Young people’s views and recommendations on reducing litter and single-use packaging, and improving recycling in Scotland.

November 2019
Acknowledgements

The Scottish Youth Parliament would like to thank colleagues from partner organisations who provided their support and expertise during the research development process and authoring of this report. In particular, we wish to thank Catherine Gemmell (Marine Conservation Society), Scott Leatham (Scottish Wildlife Trust), Sarah Moyes (Friends of the Earth Scotland), Louise Broatch (Keep Scotland Beautiful), and McKenna Smith (2050 Climate Group).

We would also like to thank all of the young people who participated in the research and shared their experiences, the organisations who supported the consultation workshops, and the Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and their Support Workers who were involved in leading the research process. In particular, we would like to thank Liam Fowley MSYP, Convener’s Trustee 2019-20; the Scottish Youth Parliament’s 2019-20 Conveners Group; and the Scottish Youth Parliament’s Campaign Delivery Group for overseeing the campaign creation and their involvement in developing and promoting the consultation.

The research process was managed, and the report authored, by Rosy Burgess, Events and Campaigns Officer at the Scottish Youth Parliament, from September to November 2019. The report was designed by Rachel Ashenden, Communications Officer, and the graphics were designed by Wiktoria Orlicka MSYP.

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The purpose of this research is to find out young people’s views and experiences of litter, single-use packaging, and recycling in Scotland, and to make recommendations to reduce pollution levels which contribute to climate change in Scotland. This section outlines the key findings from this report, and makes eight recommendations to reduce pollution levels in Scotland.

**Reducing litter**

1) **Local Authorities and the Scottish Government should make funding and support available for young people and other community groups to carry out local projects to reduce the impact of littering and increase community pride in their local area.**

2) **Local Authorities should increase the number of secure bins in public places, to reduce litter.**

3) **All young people in Scotland should receive improved practical environmental awareness education, and be empowered to take action to live more sustainably. To help achieve this, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland should take a human rights based approach when implementing the ‘Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan’, by meaningfully including children and young people in the design and delivery of LfS programmes.**

**Over one quarter of young people say litter negatively affects the way people view their area.**

**Nearly half of young people think having more or better bins in their area would reduce the amount of litter.**

**Young people think individuals should have most responsibility for reducing the amount of litter in Scotland.**
Reducing single-use packaging

4) The Scottish Government should carry out a full review of how to reduce the use of plastic, with consideration of a full or partial ban for certain products in Scotland. Further research should also be carried out to explore the reasons why people may support or oppose a ban on products being made out of plastic.

5) Shops and manufacturers, including online and offline retailers, should take steps to improve the recyclability and reusability of their packaging, and to minimise the amount of excess packaging.

6) Retailers and the food industry should ensure that reusable packaging is affordable, more readily available, and easy to use, to reduce the reliance on single-use packaging and plastic items.

Nearly three-quarters of young people think plastic packaging items are damaging to the environment.

Packaging that is recyclable and reusable is more important to young people than packaging that is affordable.

A quarter of young people would be encouraged to use environmentally friendly alternatives more often if they were cheaper or free.
7) Local Authorities and the Scottish Government should do more to raise awareness amongst young people to help them understand what can be recycled, and when recycling is collected, in their communities.

8) In order to improve recycling and encourage more people to recycle, there should be more recycling bins in public places, including in schools, colleges, and universities.
Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that listens to and values the participation of children and young people, and our goal is to do everything we can to make this vision a reality.

Every year, we run a national campaign focusing on an issue that young people care about. In June 2019, after consulting with over 10,200 young people, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) voted for our 2019-20 national campaign to focus on environmental protection.

The campaign, Pack it up, Pack it in, has been designed and developed by young people. The campaign concentrates on reducing pollution levels which contribute to climate change. We will do this by focusing on the themes of reducing single-use packaging and waste, and improving recycling in Scotland.

The aim of the campaign is to empower young people to speak out and take action to reduce pollution levels in Scotland. We will achieve this by:

- Identifying young people’s views on single-use packaging, waste, and recycling in Scotland.
- Making recommendations and calling for the changes young people want to see in relation to single-use packaging, waste, and recycling in Scotland.
- Taking action to reduce single-use packaging and waste, and to improve recycling in Scotland.

During the development of Pack it up, Pack it in, MSYPs identified that while there is some existing research about young people’s views and experiences of issues relating to the campaign themes, there is limited data relating specifically to the views of young people across the whole of Scotland.

As a rights-based organisation, our mission, vision, and values are firmly grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly Article 12: that young people have the right to express their views freely and have their opinions listened to in all matters affecting them. As such, MSYPs identified a need to consult with young people to ensure their voices inform decision-making and discussions about pollution across Scotland.

The findings of our research are set out in three key sections, in line with the three campaign themes:

**Reducing Litter**
This section explores how litter affects young people across Scotland, and young people’s views on what could be done to reduce the amount of litter. It concludes by considering who the responsibility for reducing litter in Scotland lies with.

**Reducing Single-Use Packaging**
This section discusses young people’s views on single-use plastic packaging and other items young people feel are damaging to the environment, and explores the importance of different features of packaging to young people. It concludes by discussing what would encourage young people to use environmentally-friendly alternatives.

**Improving Recycling**
This section discusses the importance of recycling to young people, how much young people recycle, and young people’s awareness of which items can currently be recycled in areas across Scotland. It concludes by summarising what would encourage young people to start recycling, or to recycle more.

This report makes eight recommendations which we think will help to reduce pollution in Scotland.
Our Approach

The research for this report was carried out during the Pack it up, Pack it in research phase, between Thursday 12th September and Friday 8th November 2019. Young people's views were collected through a survey, which was available in a paper format and online using the website SmartSurvey. Alongside this survey, MSYPs also carried out consultation workshops with young people in their constituencies.

In total, 2,051 young people aged 12-25 took part in this consultation, from every local authority in Scotland. 1,809 young people responded to the survey. A further 242 young people took part in consultation workshops, in six sessions across five local authorities. One workshop was carried out with a national voluntary organisation. 2 This report provides a summary of the national responses. More details, including regional summaries, can be made available on request.

The consultation questions were developed by SYP’s Conveners Group, in collaboration with SYP staff and the Campaign Delivery Group, following discussions with representatives of existing environmental organisations. A literature review was also carried out to enable MSYPs to identify where there may be gaps in existing research and where our consultation may add value. The consultation included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions.

Our approach focused on a research process that would produce robust findings, but also ensure the voices and experiences of young people remained at the heart of the research. The responsibility for consulting with young people across Scotland lay with MSYPs, who were trained and provided with resources to support their consultations.

SYP also shared the online survey link with other organisations who work with children and young people, with environmental organisations, and with other campaigning organisations to promote the survey more widely. Young Scot points were available to any young people who completed the survey online, through the Young Scot Rewards programme.

Although answering each question was optional, and respondents were not compelled to complete the whole survey, every question was completed by a substantial number of respondents.

1 Given the demographics of respondents, this research cannot claim to be fully representative of Scotland’s young people, particularly in terms of age (the majority of respondents were aged 12 to 17, with a relatively small number of respondents from the 18 to 26 age group). However, this research identifies some important issues pertinent to young people as a whole, and also pinpoints issues for groups of young people that could benefit further research. A profile of respondents is available on page 17.

2 Where closed questions were asked during consultation workshops, responses are incorporated into survey responses. Qualitative responses are included as quotes in the ‘young people’s views’ boxes.
Research Findings

1) Reducing Litter
This section explores how litter affects young people across Scotland, and young people’s views on what could be done to reduce the amount of litter. It concludes by considering who young people think is responsible for reducing litter in Scotland lies.

1a) How does litter affect young people in your area?
This qualitative question gave respondents space to describe how litter affects young people in their area. Responses were sorted into themes, and the most common responses are discussed below. Whilst some respondents (16.7%) felt litter has little or no affect on young people in their area, the majority suggest that litter negatively affects young people. Respondents were particularly concerned about the impact of litter on the image of their area; the environmental impact of litter; and attitudes towards litter and young people.

Key findings!

Over one quarter of young people say litter negatively affects the way people view their area.

Nearly half of young people think having more or better bins in their area would reduce the amount of litter.

Image of their area
Over one quarter (28.5%) of the young people who responded to this question said litter has a negative impact on the way they and others view their area. In particular, responses suggest young people feel litter makes their area look dirty or messy. Some young people expressed concerns that litter will put tourists off coming to visit their area, while others said litter puts them off spending time outdoors or using recreation spaces such as parks and sports fields.

Attitudes towards litter and young people
Over one fifth of survey respondents felt the existence of litter in their area has a negative impact on attitudes towards both litter and young people. Of these, 8.2% suggested people feel it is more acceptable to drop litter in an area where there is already litter, with a further 7.5% saying the presence of litter increases the feeling of apathy towards litter - the sense that people just don’t care. There is also a feeling that the existence of litter portrays a negative image of young people, with 6.1% respondents feeling young people are often blamed for littering.

Young people said:

“Living in a rural constituency, I see the effects of litter in my everyday life. Being surrounded by beautiful countryside and beaches, that [...] are covered in litter, reduces the pride we have in our area because we know it is us that have caused it.”

“A place with litter is tagged a poor area. Students could be bullied cause of their background and area they live in.”

“Litter indirectly affects young people. Litter affects the environment and this in turn affects everyone and everything.”

Environmental Impact
Young people who responded to the survey were particularly concerned about the environmental impact of litter (11.5%). Respondents predominantly identified the impact of litter on animals; water pollution; and damage to ecosystems and habitats.
1b) What could be done to reduce the amount of litter in your area?

As with the previous question, this question asked young people to share their views on what could be done to reduce the amount of litter in their area. Responses were sorted by theme, and the most common themes are discussed below.

**More options for getting rid of litter**
The vast majority of respondents would like to see more options for getting rid of litter in their area. Overwhelmingly, nearly half of the respondents (48.4%) said having more or better bins in their areas would help to reduce the amount of litter. Over one tenth (10.9%) said the amount of litter in their area would be reduced if people didn’t drop it and put it in a bin instead. However, a further 8.1% would like to see better options for recycling their waste, including more on-street recycling bins (in some cases, instead of general waste bins), and clearer information about what can be recycled. This implies that young people don’t currently feel there are enough options for disposing of their waste, and they don’t feel adequately informed about the alternatives to putting their litter in a general waste bin.

**Community action**
Some suggested litter could be reduced if communities carried out regular litter picks (8.6%) which would encourage a feeling of community spirit and help everyone to feel they are playing a part in keeping their area tidy. A further 2.2% suggested community groups could take a lead in coordinating action activities to keep the area clean and encourage others to do the same.

**Penalties and rewards**
Some respondents felt there should be stronger penalties for people who are caught littering, and steps should be taken to make sure more people who drop litter are actually caught (7.1%). On the other hand, a much smaller number (1.1%) said there should be more encouragement and rewards for correctly disposing of litter, for example through a deposit-return scheme.

**Alternative packaging**
A very small group of respondents suggested the amount of litter in their area would be reduced if there was less plastic in general (2.2%), more reusable packaging (1.6%), or if single-use packaging was banned (1.1%).

Young people said:

“With the greater public awareness of global warming effects and the real dangers that exist to humankind, the environment and ecosystems, a campaign which makes young people aware of the direct consequences littering has on those three areas may be particularly effective in the fight against persistent littering.”

“A significant increase in the availability of bins - and not just general waste bins, but giving people on the street the option to segregate and recycle their waste!”
1c) Who do you think should be most responsible for reducing the amount of litter in Scotland?

Respondents were given a list of five groups and asked to rank each group in order of responsibility for reducing the amount of litter in Scotland, from 1 (most responsible) to 5 (least responsible). Responses were collated and analysed to identify the overall ranking of each group.

Individuals were ranked as most responsible for reducing the amount of litter by over half of the respondents (56.5%). Local Councils were ranked as second-most responsible, followed by the Scottish Government third, and manufacturers fourth. Shops were ranked as least responsible for reducing the amount of litter in Scotland.

Key finding!
Young people think that individuals should have most responsibility for reducing the amount of litter in Scotland.
2) Reducing Single-Use Packaging

This section discusses young people’s views on single-use plastic packaging and other items which young people feel are damaging to the environment, and explores the importance of different features of packaging to young people. It concludes by discussing what would encourage young people to use environmentally-friendly alternatives.

2a) Would you support or oppose a ban on each of the following products being made out of plastic?

This question gave respondents a list of sixteen packaging items which commonly contain plastic, and asked them to tick whether they support or oppose a ban on each item being made out of plastic. The responses are shown in the appendix.

Overall, the majority of respondents supported a ban on all of the items listed being made out of plastic, with the exception of yoghurt pots (49.9% support) and sanitary products (39.8% support).

Respondents were asked to explain why they support and/or oppose banning these products being made out of plastic.

The main reasons given for supporting a ban included the view that the majority of these items do not need to be made out of plastic and therefore could be made with non-plastic materials; or that these items are harmful to the environment and therefore should be replaced with non-harmful or recyclable materials. Some respondents felt banning the use of plastic in these products would force manufacturers and others to change how they make and use packaging materials in a more sustainable way.

On the other hand, the main reasons for opposing a ban related particularly to sanitary products, which young people felt need to include some plastic in order to maintain hygiene and safety levels. Some respondents opposed a ban on products being made of plastic because they felt there isn’t currently a suitable alternative. In particular, a small number opposed banning plastic straws because of concerns relating to the accessibility of alternatives such as paper straws for people with disabilities, and because they felt paper straws disintegrate too quickly. There was also concern about the cost of non-plastic alternatives.

Young people said:

“All of these products can be made out of other materials, and they’re the kind of products that people often do not recycle, with many people not even being aware that some of these products are recyclable.”

“Only one I oppose banning is sanitary products...from a diversity and equality viewpoint...We need to ensure low income and homeless women are able to access these products with dignity and easily.”

“Don’t ban plastic straws. People with disabilities need them to be able eat/drink without assistance or just to eat and drink. Although there are alternatives, these don’t work for all disabled people - e.g. metal straws are really hard and disabled people can hurt themselves, paper straws can’t handle hot liquids, bamboo straws can’t be sterilised etc.”
2b) Are there any other packaging items that you believe are damaging to the environment?

This open question gave young people space to discuss any other packaging items they feel are damaging to the environment. Around one third of survey respondents (655 young people) commented. Nearly three quarters (71.3%) of responses related to plastic products, with over one tenth (12.8%) saying all plastic is damaging. Other plastic items include plastic bottles (27.4%); plastic food containers such as microwave meal and dried food packaging, and plastic bags for fruit and vegetables (13.3%); plastic bags (11.5%); plastic rings and wrapping on multipack cans (9.6%); plastic straws (7.0%); and takeaway cups, lids, and other packaging (6.9%).

Non-plastic items, including cans, paper, mixed-material packaging, and cardboard, were also discussed, although to a much smaller extent.

“I think it more depends on how they are made and the environmental impact that has because normally it is more damaging to the environment during the making of materials than it is how people choose to use them afterwards.”

“Plastic packaging on things like stationery, wrapping paper, clothing items etc is also completely unnecessary and should be banned as in these cases the plastic is not being used to keep anything safe for human consumption. I once saw metal straws for sale which were wrapped in plastic packaging which is beyond me.”

Key finding!

Nearly three-quarters of young people think plastic packaging items are damaging to the environment.
2c) When it comes to day-to-day items, how important are each of the following to you?

This question gave respondents a list of seven different features of packaging, and asked them to identify how important each feature is. The responses are shown in the appendix.10

Overall, when it comes to day-to-day items, packaging that is recyclable and packaging that is reusable rank as most important to young people, followed by packaging that is affordable. Compostable or biodegradable packaging is least important.

2d) What would encourage you to use environmentally friendly alternatives more often?

This question asked respondents to explain what would encourage them to use environmentally friendly alternatives more often.

Whilst just over one tenth (10.9%) of respondents said the environmental benefits of using environmentally friendly alternatives would encourage them to use these items more often, the vast majority said they would use alternatives more often if they were cheaper or free (24.2%); if they were more readily available and visible in shops and eating establishments (19.5%); or if it was easier to use them, for example, if more establishments encouraged their use, if there were more water refill stations, or if there was somewhere to wash the items between uses (12.4%). Just over one tenth (11.6%) of respondents said the material the items are made out of is important, with some saying design or attractiveness of alternatives would encourage them to use them more often (4.8%).

Similarly to question 1.2, a smaller number of respondents said they would be encouraged to use environmentally friendly alternatives if there were incentives such as discounts or rewards (9.8%); if ‘un-friendly’ products were banned (6.5%); or if there was a fine or other penalty for not using reusable packaging (3.1%).

Finally, some respondents said there should be more education around the benefits of using reusable alternatives (4.6%), with 4.9% calling for more advertisements, and 2.0% suggesting there should be more visible signage encouraging people to use reusable alternatives in public places.

Key findings!

Packaging that is recyclable and reusable is more important to young people than packaging that is affordable.

A quarter of young people would be encouraged to use environmentally friendly alternatives more often if they were cheaper or free.

Young people said:

“Cost - I’ve looked a lot at switching to products that are plastic free etc. but the cost of doing so is more than I can afford on a basic wage.”

“I already try and make a conscious effort. I wish attitudes would change instead of being weirdly looked out for asking for no straws in your drinks, using your coffee cup instead of the store’s disposable one. It shouldn’t be a struggle to make the better choice.”
3) Improving Recycling

This section discusses the importance of recycling to young people, how much young people recycle, and young people’s awareness of which items can currently be recycled in areas across Scotland. It concludes by summarising what would encourage young people to start recycling, or to recycle more.

3a) Which of these statements best describes how important recycling is to you?

This question asked young people to rate how important recycling is to them, from ‘very important’ to ‘not at all important’. Over three quarters (84.7%) of the survey respondents said recycling is very important or quite important to them.

Very important: 42.7%,
Quite important: 42.0%,
Not very important: 8.8%,
Not at all important: 2.7%,
Don’t know: 3.7%.

3b) Which of these statements best describes how much you recycle?

This question asked young people to identify how much they recycle, on a scale from ‘I recycle everything that can be recycled’ to ‘I do not recycle’. Over nine in ten young people recycle at least sometimes, and less than 5% do not recycle.

Respondents who said they recycle at least sometimes were then asked to pick up to three things from a list of thirteen options that motivate them to recycle. Their responses are shown on the next page.

I recycle everything that can be recycled: 36.1%
I recycle a lot but not everything that can be recycled: 38.7%
I recycle sometimes: 17.7%
I do not recycle: 4.1%
Don’t know: 3.4%.

Key finding!

Over nine in ten young people recycle at least sometimes. Of those, 70.2% do so because they know it’s good for the environment.
What motivates you to recycle?

Of those who said they recycle at least sometimes, over two thirds (70.2%) said they are motivated to recycle because it is good for the environment. Nearly half (47.0%) are motivated to recycle because it reduces the amount of litter going to landfill or to be incinerated; and one third (36.8%) said they recycle because it is the right thing to do.

- It’s good for the environment: 70.2%
- It reduces the amount of litter going to landfill/to be incinerated: 47.0%
- It’s the right thing to do: 36.8%
- It’s good for children and future generations: 28.8%
- My family does it: 18.6%
- I feel guilty if I don’t: 15.2%
- It’s easy and doesn’t take any extra effort: 14.9%
- It saves space in my waste bin or in my home: 14.4%
- It makes me feel part of a wider effort: 6.9%
- It sends a signal to other people: 5.0%
- Being nagged by others: 4.3%
- Don’t know: 2.8%
- Nothing, I don’t recycle: 0.4%
3c) Which of these items can currently be recycled in your area?

This question asked young people to identify what can be recycled in their area from a list of eleven items. Generally, respondents were aware that more commonly-recycled items can be recycled in their area. However, there was less awareness of whether or not items such as drinks cartons, clothes, plastic bags, small electrical items, or batteries can be recycled in their area. The results are shown in the appendix.iii

Young people were then asked to identify whether they already knew this information, or whether they looked it up in order to answer the question. Whilst the majority said they already knew, a small number said they did not and had found it difficult to find the answer. Some respondents felt information is directed at homeowners and is therefore not accessible to young people. This suggests there is an issue relating to awareness and information about what can and can’t be recycled across Scotland.

3d) What, if anything, would encourage you to start recycling, or to recycle more?

Survey respondents were asked to select up to three things, from a list of fifteen options, which would encourage them to start recycling or to recycle more. Of those who said nothing would encourage them to start recycling, or to recycle more, 7.0% said they already recycle everything they can, and just 2.2% said they are not interested in recycling. All other responses are sorted by theme and discussed below.

### Availability of recycling facilities

The vast majority of respondents who answered this question said they would be encouraged to start recycling, or to recycle more, if there were better or more facilities for recycling. Over half would be encouraged to recycle if there were more recycling bins in public places (56.1%), or in schools, colleges, and universities (36.8%). One third of respondents (33.7%) would be encouraged to recycle if they could recycle more types of litter in their area, and one fifth said recycling bins should be emptied more often (20.4%). Just over one tenth (12.7%) would like to see more recycling centres in their area, and a further tenth would recycle if there was a recycling bin in their house (10.4%).

### Information about recycling

In terms of information relating to recycling, one fifth (20.0%) would be encouraged to recycle if they had better or more information about what can be recycled, whereas a much smaller number would like better or more information about the benefits of recycling (11.4%), or about what happens to recycled materials

### Penalties and rewards

As discussed in previous questions, a smaller number of respondents said they would be encouraged to recycle if there were charges for not recycling (17.4%), or if there were incentives to recycle (17.1%).

“To my knowledge there’s no recycling centres in the local area and our council does not have a recycling collection.”

“[It’s] Understandable that many young people would not be aware as many things you assume would be recyclable are actually not.”

“My accommodation provided me with recycling bins. It would be great if as many companies as possible would do so as well.”
Respondents Profile

In total, 2,051 young people took part in this consultation. Responses were received from every Local Authority, and from the eleven national voluntary organisations represented within SYP.

Age
12-14: 46.0%
15-17: 38.6%
18-20: 7.0%
21-23: 2.5%
24-26: 2.9%
No response: 3.1%

Gender
Male: 39.5%
Female: 53.8%
Non-binary identity: 2.0%
I prefer to use my own term: 1.2%
Prefer not to say: 1.3%
No response: 2.3%

Current education status
School: 81.8%
College: 3.0%
University: 6.4%
Apprenticeship: 0.9%
Other training: 0.4%
None of these: 5.0%
No response: 2.5%

Regions (1,670 respondents)
Glasgow and Central Scotland: 22.5%
Highlands and Islands: 4.7%
Lothian: 7.7%
Mid Scotland and Fife: 5.7%
North East Scotland: 5.0%
South Scotland: 41.1%
West Scotland: 13.3%

Appendix

i. 2a) Would you support or oppose a ban on each of the following products being made out of plastic?
ii. 2c) When it comes to day-to-day items, how important are each of the following to you?

![Importance of day-to-day items](chart)

iii. 3c) Which of these items can currently be recycled in your area?

![Recyclable items in your area](chart)
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