

Public opinion research on the Deposit Return Scheme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) is set to be introduced across the UK in 2027. The policy would improve our recycling systems, clean up highly valued green spaces, and is a popular policy amongst voters:

- Exclusive polling for Reloop has found that 69% of the public support the implementation of a DRS.
- Voters are hugely supportive of recycling in general, with 83% of respondents expressing a positive view of the practice when polled and only 4% opposed.
- The public are looking to Government to act on waste. The polling suggests that 89% of the public believe that national government has at least a fair amount of responsibility for recycling.
- DRS creates economic and environmental benefits. This includes a potential £11bn saving from the social cost of litter, and environmental benefits such as higher recycling rates and a potential greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 0.46 million tonnes a year by 2032.

Devolved nations, in particular the Welsh Government, are driving ahead with the policy, boosting environmental ambition through the inclusion of glass bottles.

BACKGROUND

A deposit return scheme is a tried and tested system to encourage the return of packaging to collection points through the incentive of a refundable deposit paid by consumers at the point of purchase. A DRS will drive up recycling rates, with associated benefits for climate and nature.¹ In Germany, their DRS scheme has helped deliver a recycling rate of 98% for materials included.²

The Government first announced its intention to introduce a DRS in 2017, but delays mean the policy is now set to be introduced in 2027. Initially announcing the scheme, then Environment Secretary Michael Gove stressed the urgency of its introduction, saying "it is

¹ Defra 2021 DRS consultation impact assessment, including the figure of £11bn in societal benefits https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environment/consultation-on-introducing-a-drs/supporting_documents/Impact%20Assessment.pdf

² Reloop, 'How they perform' 2022: https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/RELOOP_Factsheet_Performance_1212022.pdf

absolutely vital we act now to tackle this threat and curb the millions of plastic bottles a day that go unrecycled.”³

With every year that passes, the UK is falling behind international best practice, with the proposals for England and Northern Ireland now also lacking the ambition of the Welsh Labour Government’s proposed scheme which aims to include glass bottles.⁴ More schemes are now in operation across Europe, see table below, with the latest launching in the Republic of Ireland earlier this year.

Recently implemented DRSs in Europe and the scope of materials covered:

Country	Legislation Enacted	System Operator appointment	System start date	Scope
Slovakia	September 2019	February 2021	January 2022	plastic, metal
Latvia	August 2020	January 2021	February 2022	plastic, metal, glass
Malta	July 2020	September 2020	November 2022	plastic, metal, glass
Romania	October 2021	May 2022	November 2023	plastic, metal, glass
Hungary	February 2021	February 2022	January 2024	plastic, metal, glass

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF WASTE AND DEPOSIT SYSTEMS

Reloop has commissioned BPC accredited polling from Portland Communications⁵ to understand the wider policy context around waste in the UK and public support for the DRS policy. The findings are outlined below:

Policy context

Support for recycling:

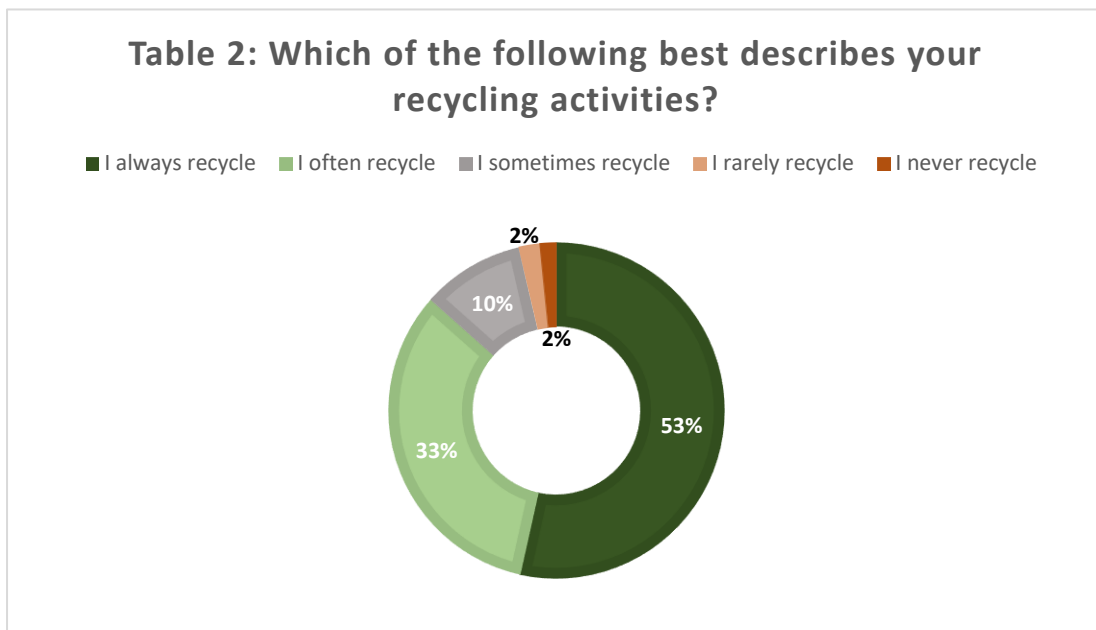
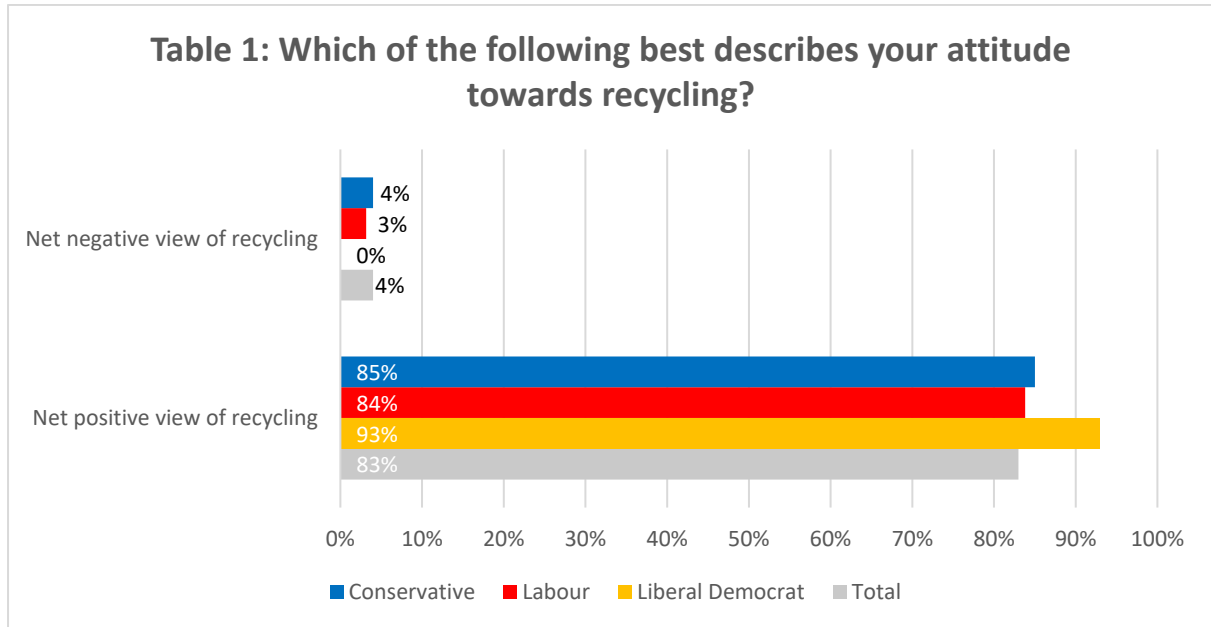
Overall, the British public express very high levels of support for recycling. 83% of respondents stated a positive view of the practice, with 84% of current Labour voters reporting a positive attitude, 85% of Conservatives and 93% of Liberal Democrats, see Table

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deposit-return-scheme-in-fight-against-plastic>

⁴ The Welsh Labour Government are actively defending their position on glass. In April 2024, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, said “the evidence on glass is clear. With over 50 successful international examples of DRSs where the overwhelming majority include glass as standard. Not only should Wales not have to settle for less than the international best practice standard, but it is essential if we are to continue to make progress against our baseline and ensure the scheme will be effective in supporting the transition to net zero”. <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-update-development-deposit-return-scheme>

⁵ Survey from 1,000 participants of a nationally and politically representative sample of the GB public. The survey was conducted between the 19th – 22nd January 2024. It was conducted and analysed by Portland Communications for Reloop. Full data set available on request.

1. Only a tiny fraction (4%) of the public report rarely or never recycling, with 86% of respondents reporting that they always or often recycle, see Table 2.

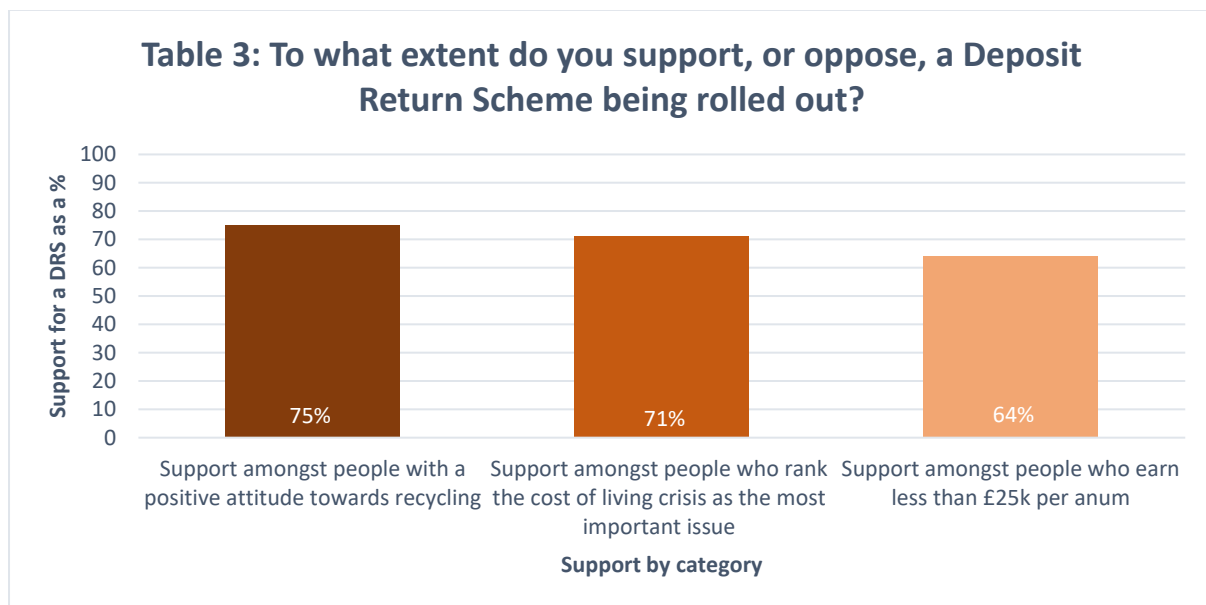


Responsibility for recycling:

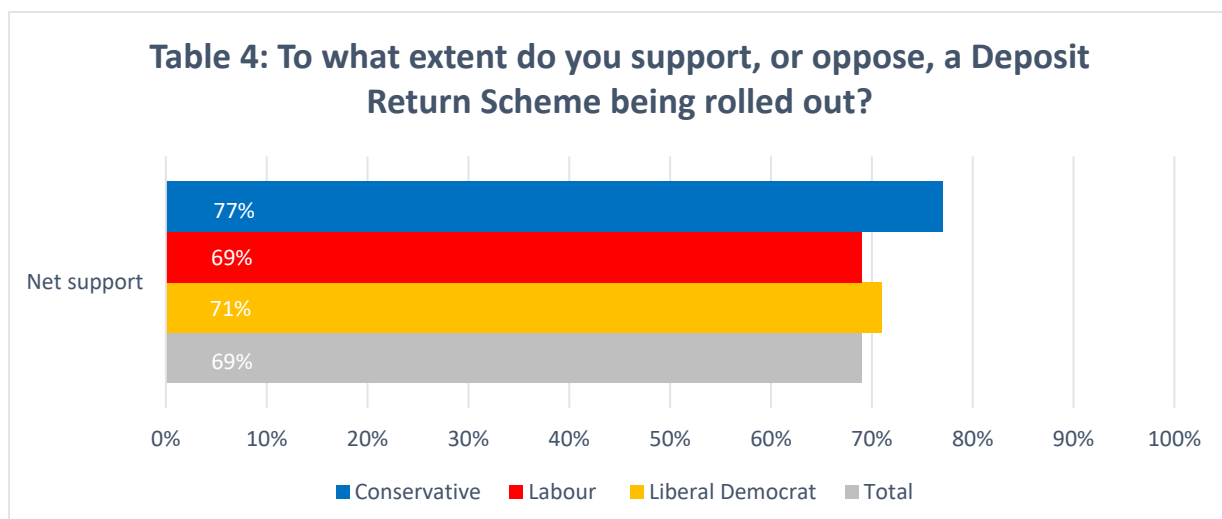
Our polling suggests that 89% of the public believe that national government has at least a fair amount of responsibility for recycling, and 88% think the same for individuals. So DRS, which is implemented by the national government to help incentivise individuals to recycle, clearly fits within the public’s understanding of how a recycling system should operate.

DRS: support for the policy

DRS aims to complement and enhance existing recycling systems. Among respondents with a positive attitude to recycling, our polling found that DRS is an extremely popular policy. 75% of these respondents support the scheme, see Table 3, and only 9% of these expressed opposition. Among those who rank the cost of living as the most important issue, 71% of these voters support DRS, and support stands at 64% among those earning less than £25k per year.

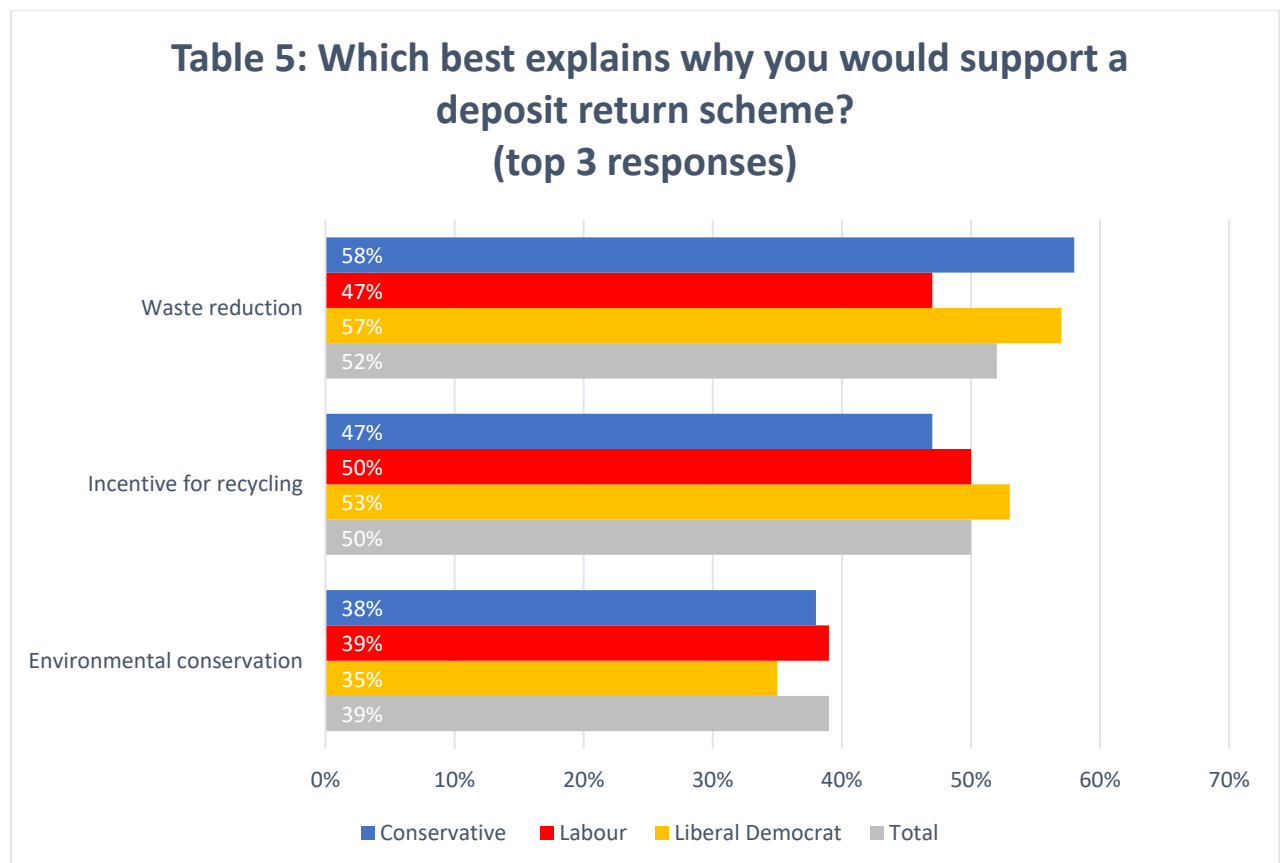


On a party basis, once the scheme has been explained to respondents, net support for DRS (either strongly or somewhat supporting the policy) stands at 69% among current Labour voters, see Table 4, with only 11% opposed. Support is highest among Conservative voters, standing at 77% for current voters for the party, with 71% of current Liberal Democrat voters in support.



Motivation for support:

Our polling suggests that among Labour voters, the single greatest motivation for supporting a DRS is the creation of a monetary incentive to drive recycling (50%), suggesting these voters are supportive of policies to incentivise collective responsibility and action. Among Liberal Democrat and Conservative voters, the greatest motivation is the benefit of waste reduction through minimising single-use container waste with a DRS, see Table 5.



Reloop works at the centre of policy-making with governments, industry stakeholders and NGOs. Leading the transition to a global circular economy, where our natural resources remain resources. For more information, contact Jenni Hume, UK and Ireland Director, Reloop - jenni.hume@reloopplatform.org