



LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY
LEEDS BUSINESS SCHOOL

MAY 2025

COLLABORATIVE INDUSTRY GROUP FUTURE OF PACKAGING

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE RETAIL INSTITUTE



FUTURE OF PACKAGING 2025 RECOMMENDATIONS



THE PACKAGING SYSTEM

The collective packaging, retail supply chain and the waste industry working collaboratively.

INDUSTRY AND THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

- Industry must drive change, rather than rely on government action.
- Industry should work with government to develop future national self-sufficiency in sourcing and processing packaging materials.
 - Enable new methods for domestic manufacturing and circular economy practices.
 - Develop localised supply chains to minimise risks of global disruptions as well as scope 3 carbon emissions.
- Collectively develop circularity on a systemic level to prevent waste of valuable resources.
- Learn from successful reuse systems and work on effective models, systems and packaging design

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

- Build trust with stakeholders through collaboration across society and sectors (industry, government, academia and NGOs), using scientific evidence, eliminating green-washing and ensuring integrity and consistency when communicating environmental goals and progress on these with the public.
- Coordinate communication with policymakers to provide a balanced and representative case from the whole sector and set an example for sustainable transition that other sectors can follow.
- Appoint a trusted spokesperson for the packaging industry to convey the complexities of the sustainable transition in FMCG goods.
- Recognise that circularity depends on industry collaboration.
 - Create an independent body to work towards "project by project circularity for all packaging materials". This would gather evidence and share learning on problems and solutions for national policy and sustainable packaging solutions.

ESTABLISHING STANDARDS

- Work with government, universities and non-governmental organisations to standardise packaging and its related measures and systems.
- Align organisational goals and actions for greater supply chain harmonisation.
 - This could be achieved with action learning groups for cross-organisational learning and consistency, to achieve circularity and efficiency of materials and formats.
- Cooperate across supply chains to help all partners to reduce Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

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GOVERNMENT

This applies to all governmental institutions in the UK.

SPENDING

- Invest in scientific research and support academic facilitation of multi-stakeholder groups, including policymakers, to ensure representation of interests in sharing knowledge, shaping policy and embedding better environmental skills and solutions.
- EPR and the polluter pays principle should ensure funding for the waste management industry and a reliable flow of post-consumer waste.
- Funding support for innovation in recycling technologies of existing materials to enable true circularity, whilst making the secondary materials market financially viable to enterprises.
- Develop a strategy for UK self-sufficiency in packaging, incorporating spending plans and standardisation measures.

STANDARDISATION

- Lead the process of defining and agreeing environmental principles and communicating key messages to all involved, including the public.
- Provide official guidance on a standard approach to LCA for packaging materials to provide greater clarity in design decisions, rationalise the range of materials in use, and streamline waste collections and materials sent for recycling, thus enhancing their value.
- Develop a strategy for standardisation and investment in waste management processing in the UK, ensuring the same types of materials are consistently collected at the kerbside and recycled at the end of life.
 - Develop more considered waste management approaches for food waste, enable initiatives that target the creation of value from waste, ban some of the hardest to recycle plastics and invest in national infrastructure and technology.
- Standardise packaging materials and formats based on solutions that fulfil circular economy criteria to focus industry efforts and, by optimising and sharing technology and recycling equipment, improve efficiencies and boost the value of collected waste.
- Simplify pack formats to aid alignment of the packaging and retail sectors.
 - This includes replacing complex, difficult-to-recycle multi-polymer packaging with mono-polymers and design for the ease of consumer and waste management practices.
- Regulate to provide a road map of preferred materials, enabling research & development into sustainable alternatives.
 - Fiscal incentives and grants can encourage businesses to develop and use sustainable materials.

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ENCOURAGING TRUST

- Legislate to define and curb greenwashing to enhance public trust in packaging.
- Integrate a better understanding of the complexities of packaging and the waste system into policy.
 - Legislative tools that offer incentives, capacity building, public education, targets or regulation should be evidence-based and incorporate understanding of human behaviour to limit uncertainty for businesses.
- Consider how government can support circular, closed-loop and reuse systems, which could transform entire supply chains from how goods are designed to how they are recycled.

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PACKAGING ORGANISATIONS

Individual organisations and trade associations, industry bodies in packaging, the retail supply chain and waste.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

- Recognise that circularity depends on industry collaboration and that industry is the catalyst for change.
 - Be open to collaboration, learning and sharing what works (and what does not) across the supply chain, with dedicated representation from senior decision makers.
- Accept responsibility as manufacturers and retailers for the recycling of their products and recognise the benefits of removing waste from operations.
- Ensure strong leadership and environmental advocacy within the organisation to maintain momentum and increase engagement with stakeholders over time.
- Continuously innovate in incorporating renewable energy to help businesses to meet net zero targets.
- Find ways to mitigate risks around consumer acceptance of new solutions, such as refill systems.

PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

- Implement long-term planning tools, that include considerations for continuous learning and upskilling employees to manage new complexities.
- Allow for flexibility in planning and the potential of occasional failure to aid the learning process.
- Where necessary, change the organisational culture by bringing more awareness on practicalities, attitudes and the other barriers to overcome in working towards circularity.

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EVIDENCE AND LEADERSHIP

Applies to all sectors and organisations.

USE GOOD EVIDENCE

- Follow principles of evidence-based decision-making and develop consistent messages for appropriate communication channels.
- Make collective, evidence-based cases for sustainable products.
- Establish scientifically informed and standardised Life Cycle Assessments for each product & packaging to develop an evidence base for sustainable innovation.
 - This evidence will inform long-term planning and help policymakers and practitioners find solutions that solve urgent global environmental problems while managing the local consequences of those solutions. This will also empower consumers to make better environmental choices at the point of purchase.
- Universities to generate independent, empirically tested evidence to inform strategies, and practice and communication with the public and media.
- Support and encourage the media to report balanced and reliable information on sustainable consumption and recycling practices.

LEAD WITH A VISION

- Leadership and vision are needed for all sectors, including government, industry, academia and NGOs.
 - This can be supported by academically facilitated groups (Action Learning).
- Academia and NGOs to collaborate to help inform potential solutions, combining associated strengths in research, relationships with industry and campaigning.
- Evaluate waste interventions, including educational and recycling-boosting campaigns, and use examples of successful initiatives to promote further interventions.

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PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Actions relating to enhancing public awareness, understanding and behaviours relating to packaging sustainability.

- Awareness-raising initiatives and education to inform consumers about their role in environmental protection and ensuring the success of packaging and waste initiatives.
- Encourage public recognition of what actions are taken to reduce the environmental impact of packaging and how consumer choices can impact the planet.
- A public awareness campaign, promoted through television or other entertainment services, that presents the industry's case for making packaging more sustainable.
- Educational institutions should aim to improve environmental literacy across all programmes, including the role of packaging and how waste is processed.
- Anti-littering campaigns in schools and communities, based on research into effective educational programmes for the different consumer demographics.
- Collaborative communication campaigns between universities, industry, NGOs and councils about the correct way to recycle household waste.
- Identify public figures or organisations that can explain or advocate industry actions on packaging sustainability, encouraging more balanced perceptions of packaging.



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