

# Young People's Panel 2024

Final Report: November 2024



**1** Background and methodology

**2** Future customer perspectives

**3** Ensuring inclusive and effective strategies to reach all customers

**4** Influence and engagement within the water sector

**5** Core task: smart meter rollout

**6** Conclusions





## ICEBREAKER EXERCISE

The biggest swimming pool in the world is 1.5km long and \$1.5bn to build. How many litres of water does it hold?

# Background and methodology

## Overarching Objectives

**1** **To introduce** young people to the water sector and Wessex Water's operations

**2** **To gain insight into** young people's attitudes towards environmental issues and water companies

**3** **To engage** future customers in deliberating on real business challenges

**4** **To provide** a platform for young people to influence decision-making processes



## 2024 Objectives



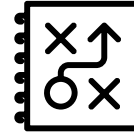
### Future Customer Insights

- **Explore** youth perspectives on generational / environmental changes
- **Assess** cost-of-living crisis' impact on young people



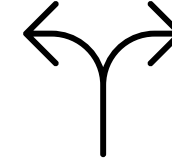
### Water Sector Engagement

- **Introduce** key business areas
- **Gather** feedback on improving water company reputation and trust



### Working for all customers

- **Develop** mitigations addressing vulnerability and accessibility



### Involvement and Decision-Making

- **Understand** current youth involvement and effectiveness of decision-making methods (e.g. citizens' assemblies)



### Core Task: Smart Meter Rollout

- **Create** inclusive rollout strategies
- **Consider** innovative incentives and communication approaches



## Application Process

Blue Marble engaged 57 schools and colleges across the region

## Selection

30 applicants chosen from across 18 schools

### Day 1 (11<sup>th</sup> Sept):



- 28 future customers attended
- Water sector immersion
- Vulnerability deep dive with personas
- Future customer 'temperature check'
- Core task briefing

### Day 2 (8<sup>th</sup> Oct):



- 27 future customers attended
- Team presentations and feedback
- Citizen's assembly and how to get people involved
- Incident response plan
- Early careers panel
- Judges feedback



### School survey



- **721 students** from years 12 and 13 across 12 different schools and colleges took part
- **Survey design** complementing YPP and included trend questions from previous years
- **Fieldwork dates** 20<sup>th</sup> September – 9<sup>th</sup> October



1

Future customers are feeling the pressure of their increased responsibilities as new adults, but also feeling like they are still seen as children by other adults. They feel at an impasse; being asked to **solve the wicked problems of the world yet not being given the chance to have an impact** (due to having to focus on school and their plans for the future)

2

Future customers feel they have a **limited ability to influence change** and decision making within their communities and society-at-large. They have the most influence within their schools, but even this is at the whim of the faculty. They encourage Wessex Water to **continue giving them a voice**, with suggestions to embed an ambassador programme throughout the entire school year

3

Future customers did not report one singular pressing environmental concern, as there has been in previous years – **instead they are cognisant of all facets of the climate crisis**, perhaps indicating more widespread awareness of the impacts of climate change

4

Social media is **strongly embedded in the lives of young people**. Indeed, they use social media to communicate with their peers, as an information source and research tool, and as part of their activism by amplifying the voices of other creators. Engaging in this space is key to engaging with young people but **needs to be done authentically** (and not be 'cringe') in order to have an impact

5

The smart meter rollout task highlighted what future customers expect from Wessex Water:

- A strong focus on educating customers on the need for, and benefits of, smart meters
- App-based interactivity, which forms a one-stop-shop
- Incentives utilising a points system, but also leveraging peoples' competitive natures
- Physical touchpoints to supplement the digital focus



# Future Customer Perspectives





Future customers highlight the increasing demands that come with becoming adults

## Increased responsibility brings more pressure...

- **Future customers feel pressure** from the increased demands of A-levels, driving lessons and university applications, as well as **responsibility for their future** financial decisions and environmental actions
- Many feel that they are **simultaneously given adult responsibilities**, whilst still being **treated like children** by those in power
- **The cost-of-living crisis is a burden**, with financial stress impacting their spending and **employment habits**, family dynamics, and ideas of what their future will look like

"...it's just like really hard to live as like a young person [...] **university's so competitive and job market's so competitive and everything costs so much** [...] kind of anxious about what you can do next."

"We're sort of treated like an adult, but also not. It's like you've got more responsibilities but you're **being babied at the same time.**"

"I think there's a lot **more pressure in our generation**. I think we're supposed to be the generation who's supposed to save the planet and do everything else, but **there's also not much we can do at the moment to do anything to help with that.**"

## ...but also more independence

- The responsibility comes with **more free time and independence in 6<sup>th</sup> form**:
  - Choosing their own subjects
  - Having more say over their time
- Although it brings some pressures, **social media can support connections** to friends and bring inspiration for future decisions

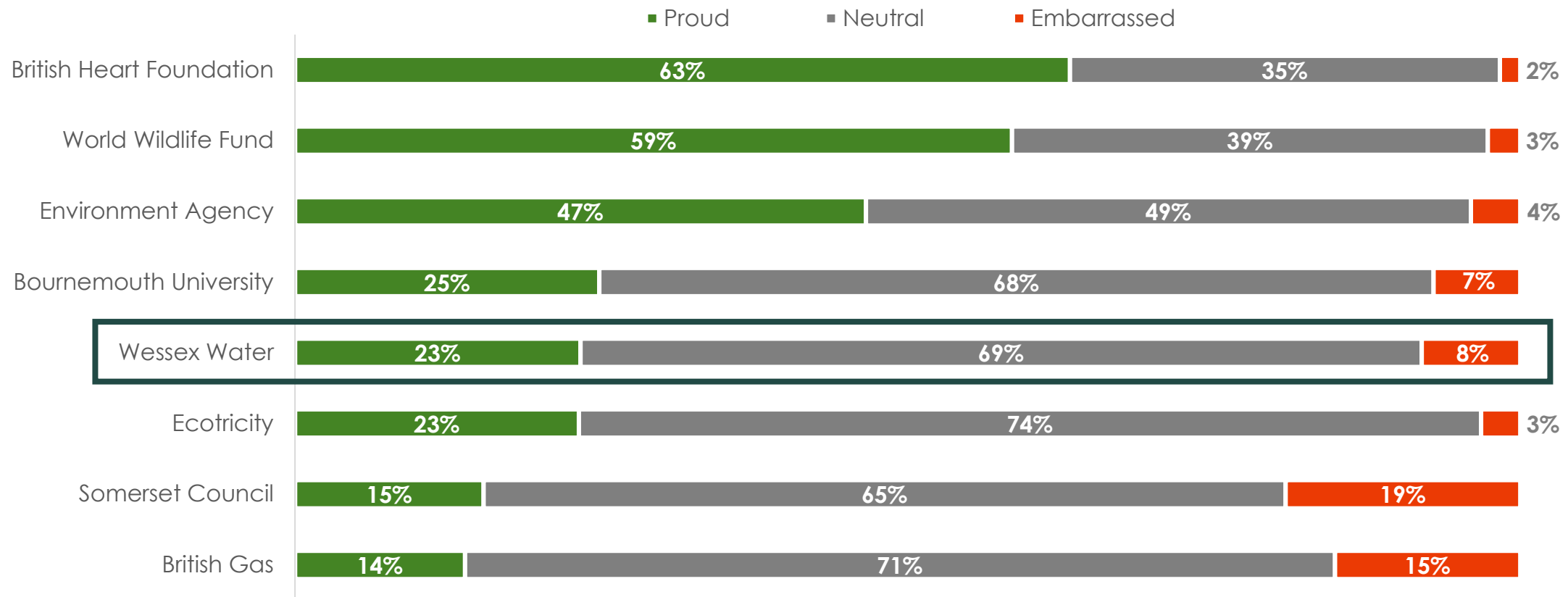
"**I enjoy having more freedom, but equally, there's a lot more responsibility** [...] I wouldn't say it's changed for the better or the worse. It's just different."

"... it's not just homework anymore, there's, like, deadlines and uni entrance exams. But you're kind of like, **shaping what you want to do in the future slowly.**"

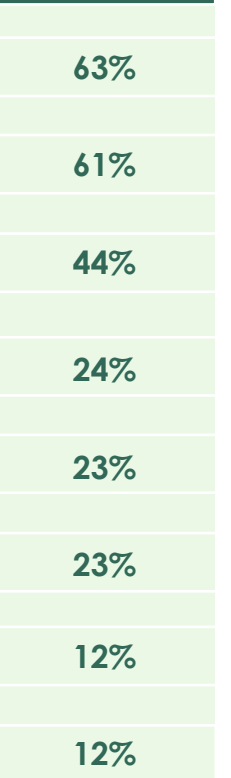


Sentiment about Wessex Water is comparable to Bournemouth University and Ecotricity

## Thinking ahead to when you are working, would you feel proud, neutral or embarrassed about working for the following...



2023: 'Proud'



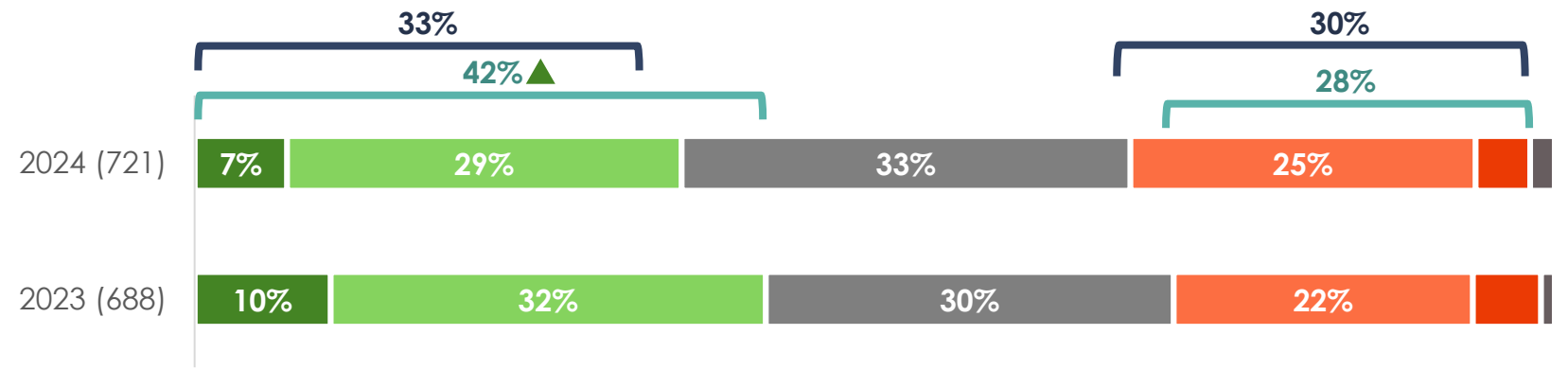
Q17. Thinking ahead to when you are working, would you feel proud, neutral or embarrassed about working for the following? Base: (721)  
 Nb: 'Don't know' option removed this year



However, those from independent and grammar schools are significantly more likely than those from state schools to feel positively about their future prospects



## Perceived **financial** prospects in the next 10 years

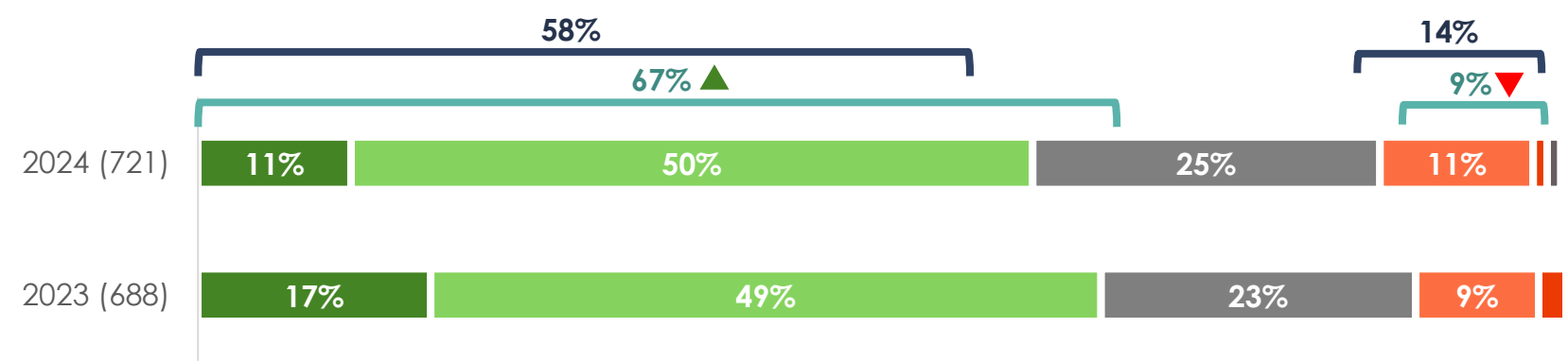


**Net positive / optimistic**  
or  
**Net negative / pessimistic**

■ State (466)   ■ Grammar / Independent (255)

▲ ▼ Denotes where grammar / independent scores are significantly higher / lower than state scores

## Perceived **employment** prospects in the next 10 years



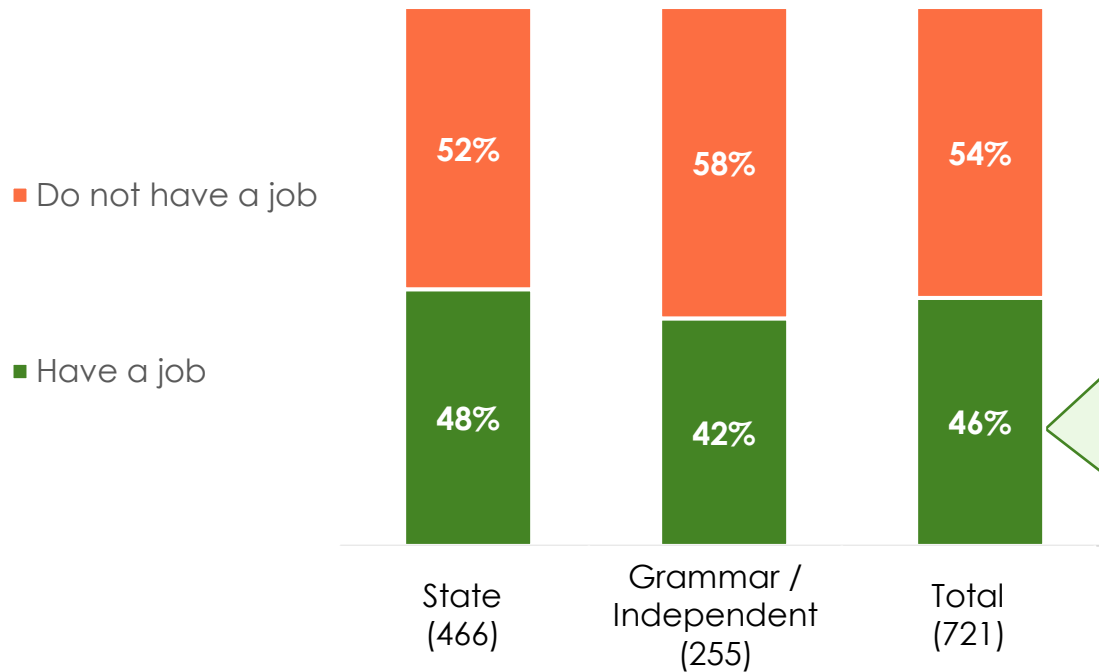
- Very positive / optimistic
- Quite positive / optimistic
- Neutral
- Quite negative / pessimistic
- Very negative / pessimistic
- Don't know / not applicable



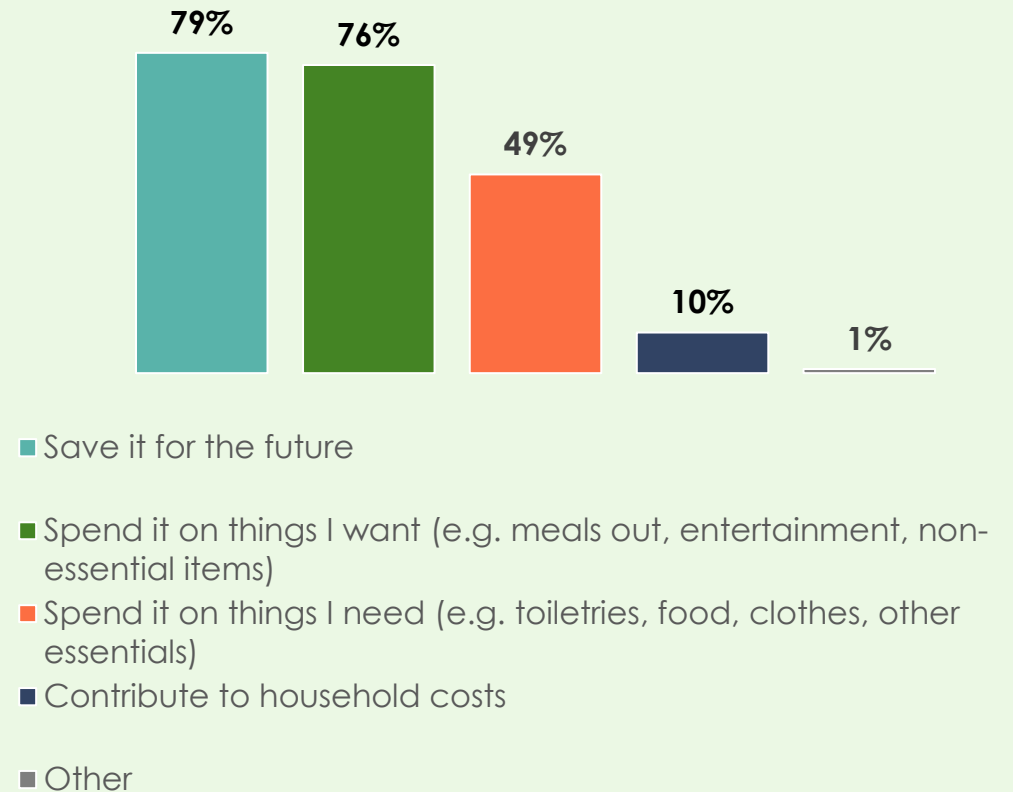
Slightly less than half of all future customers have a job. Those who attend state schools are slightly more likely to have a job than those who attend grammar or independent schools



## Do you currently have a job?



## What do you spend your money from your job on?



There are no significant differences in how students from different school types spend their money

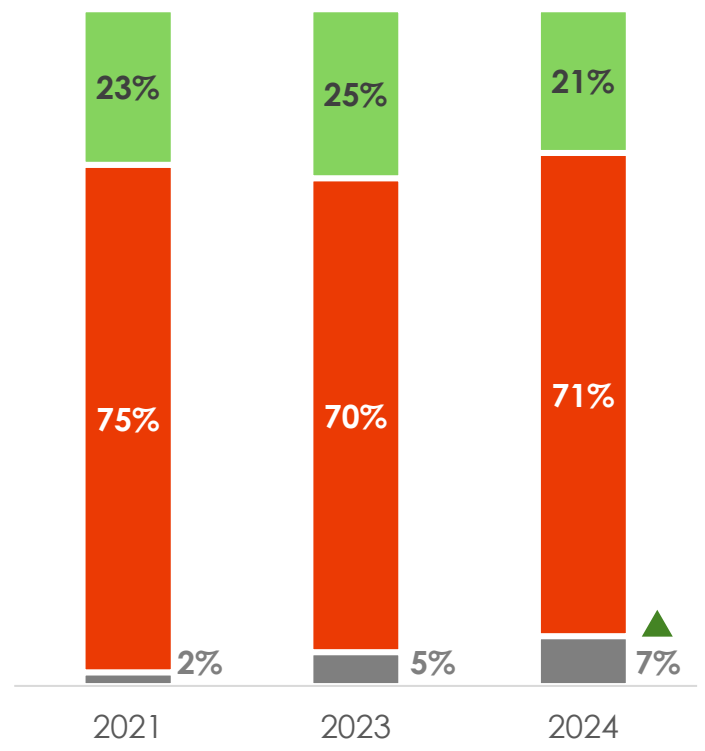
Q15. Do you currently have a job? Asked to 721 respondents attending state schools (n=466) and grammar / independent schools (n=255)  
 Q16. What do you spend your money from your job on? Asked to 223 respondents attending state schools (n=149) and grammar / independent schools (n=74)



The proportion who are unsure how they feel about how climate change may affect people in the UK in the future, as well the proportion who don't think about their impact on the environment, has risen significantly **compared to 2021**

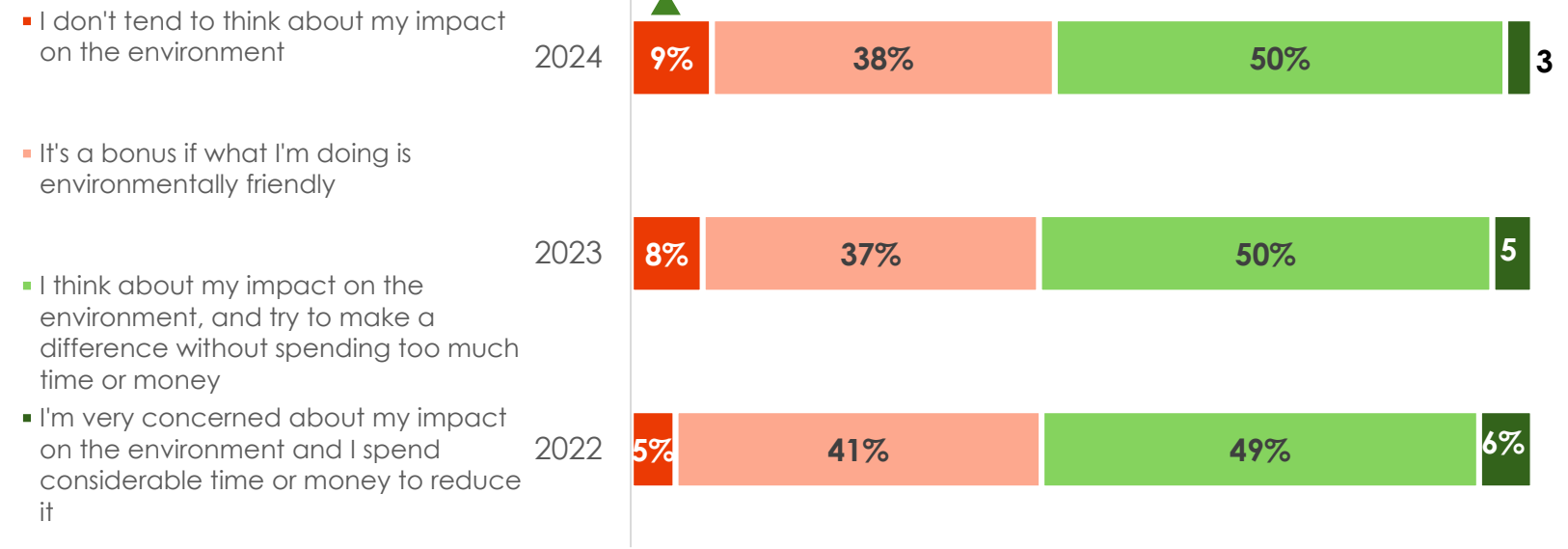


## Considering how climate change might affect people in the UK, how do you feel about the future?



- Very or quite optimistic
- Very or quite worried
- Don't know

## Thinking about what you buy, how you travel and how you live your day-to-day life, which of these best describes you?



- **Optimism about the future has dropped slightly**, alongside a significant rise in uncertainty about the future since 2021.
- While still a minority, **more respondents report not considering their environmental impact**, and fewer express strong environmental concerns.

▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower than 2021

Q7: Thinking about what you buy, how you travel and how you live your day-to-day life, which of these best describes you? Base: 2022 (532) / 2023 (688) / 2024 (721)  
 Q5: Considering how climate change might affect people in the UK, how do you feel about the future? Base: 2021 (532) / 2023 (326) / 2024 (721)



## Top three most concerning environmental issues affecting the UK (% who ranked issue within top three)



- **Environmental concerns are more evenly spread this year**, though a clear hierarchy remains.
- **The statistical shift in responses suggests future customers consider a wider range of issues important.**
- This could be due to increased environmental literacy or broader media coverage.

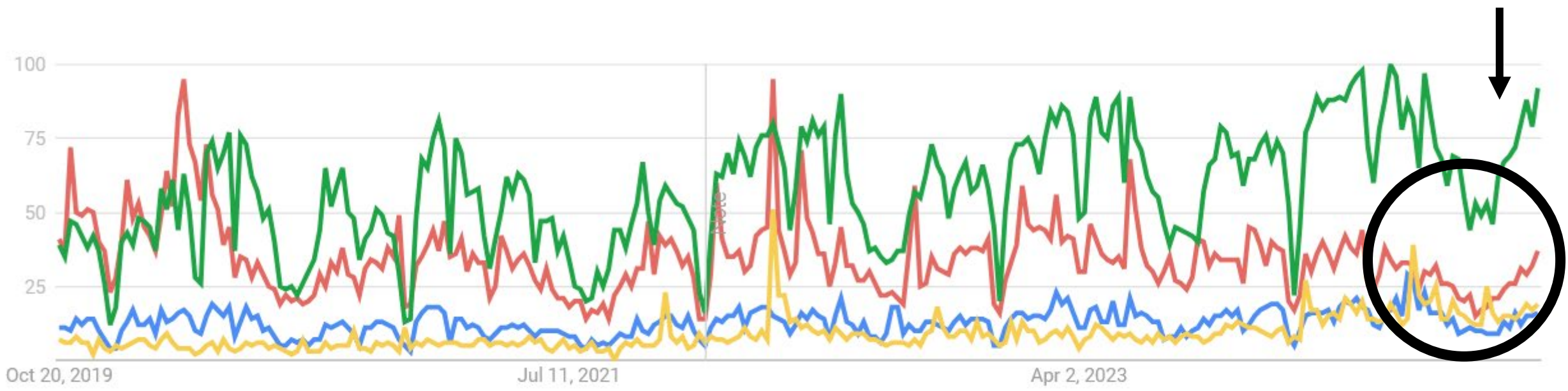
	2021	2023	2024	
Air pollution from household smoke and road vehicles	61%	64%	46%	↓
Micro plastics in the environment	61%	36%	44%	↑
Reduced biodiversity	36%	26%	37%	↑
More frequent and severe flooding from rivers and the sea	36%	48%	33%	↓
River pollution from sewage			32%	
Pollution of rivers and sea by sewage	28%	44%		
More frequent and severe heatwaves			30%	
More frequent and severe droughts	16%	25%	27%	
The need for more trees to be planted	33%	35%	25%	↓
Erosion of soil and reduced soil fertility	15%	11%	15%	
River pollution from agriculture	13%	7%	11%	

Q6. Below is a list of environmental issues affecting the UK, please pick the top three most concerning to you and rank them in order. ('1' = most concern) Base: 2023 (688) / 2024 (721)  
 Below is a list of environmental issues affecting the UK, please pick the **top THREE most concerning to you** Base: 2021 (326)



Water pollution vs Air pollution vs Microplastics vs Biodiversity

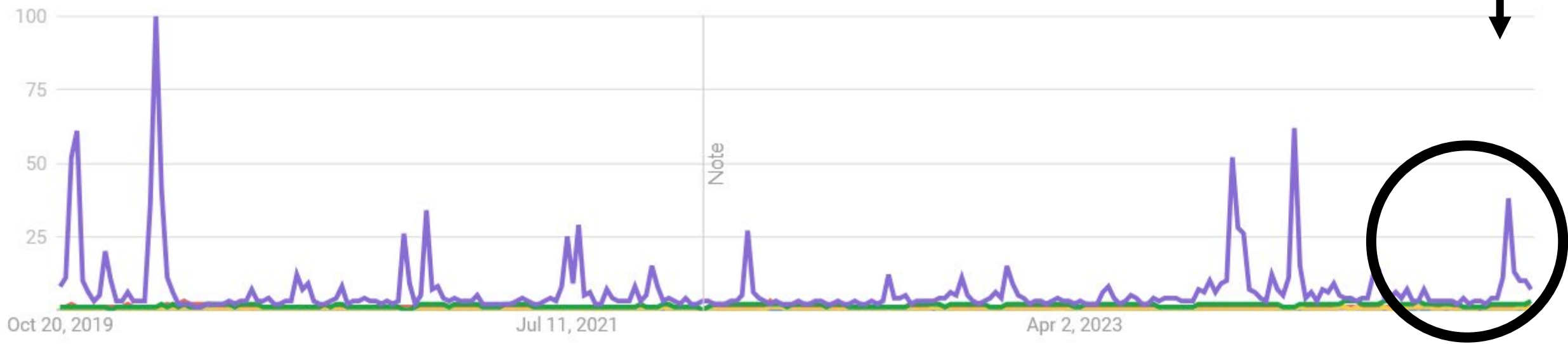
Survey:  
Sep –Oct  
2024



- There is some convergence evident in search terms related to most common concerns (excluding flooding) just before fieldwork, which could explain the more even distribution seen in the 2024 data.
- Fieldwork occurred in the lead up to the COP16 summit, likely contributing to the upwards trend of searches relating to biodiversity, and the increasing concern about reduced biodiversity

Water pollution vs Air pollution vs Microplastics vs Biodiversity vs Flooding

Survey:  
Sep - Oct  
2024



Note

'Flooding' has such high search volumes that comparisons are difficult to make / see



They welcome initiatives that enable them to have their say, but caveat that this needs to be authentic to feel worthwhile

## Future customers feel they have influence within their schools, but limited influence elsewhere

- Future customers spoke to us about how as senior students they have some level of **influence within their schools**, e.g.:
  - Presenting topics at full school assemblies
  - Student leadership roles
  - Organising and lobbying for various school clubs
- However, their teachers are **gatekeepers of this influence**:
  - Some future customers mention that teachers vet any topics they present on, and some ban attendance at events like marches
  - Initiatives like student councils are often perceived as virtue-signalling, and not leading to action

*"My school doesn't have really anything. It's got like a kind of student council, but it very rarely sort of meets up and kind of whatever gets said there doesn't ever really leave the room. And it just kind of ends up with lots of people being unmotivated. To even go, they better give up for lunchtime and then nothing happens, and it just becomes quite boring."*

- **Outside of school, future customers feel they have limited influence.** While some may volunteer with various charities and other organisations, they are at the whim of more senior staff, and have no decision-making authority

*"It depends on the conditions you're in. So like in society in general I feel like I've got less power whereas in school I feel like your voice is more heard."*

## Forums like citizens' assemblies are seen as useful, but need to be done right to be effective

- Future customers feel research vehicles such as citizens assemblies are an effective way to **ensure 'normal' peoples voices are heard** in an in-depth and meaningful way

*"I think it's very important because when sort of a group of people you feel equal to, you're not having to go and speak out to some big high castle that you don't feel as though you've got a voice in. I think it allows more normal people to express their opinions and have a sense. Very useful."*

*"I think they're a good idea to actually gauge public opinion, rather than just, like, in a political way, just using focus groups. I think it's, like, a much better way to actually gauge public opinion. And I think that when public gets educated, they make the right decisions."*

- However, some future customers note that as a tool, citizens assemblies might only work well for issues that affect the general population as a whole – care needs to be taken to **amplify, and not minimise, minority voices**



However, some future customers question their effectiveness, or whether those in attendance may have ulterior motives

## Marches as a concept are a good way to have your voice heard

- Future customers perceive protest marches as a good way to **engage with the causes they care about**. Marches provide them a forum in which to **connect with like-minded individuals, amplify activist voices**, and be **part of a movement**
- However, attending a march needs to be a smooth process, otherwise future customers are less likely to attend:
  - **Location:** If a march is difficult to get to, attendance will be lower
  - **Pushback from authority figures:** Some schools have banned attendance at certain marches
  - **Salience:** The intent behind the march needs to be clear, and needs to resonate with future customers

*"I'd like to think so, but I think they've always got to it as a last resort because sort of writing to people and letting your voice be heard sort of a non-forceful way. I think just a huge mass of people who allow politicians see the amount of people that do care about it."*

*"... I think that public protest is, like, essential to democracy..."*

## Unfortunately, marches are easy to co-opt for other purposes, and people don't always attend for the right reasons

- Future customers are conscious that 'bad actors' can result in attending a march being a negative experience:
  - **Unruly behaviour:** Being in a large crowd makes it easier for people to feel they can get away with anti-social behaviour, such as was seen at the recent EDL riots across England
  - **Spin doctoring:** Causes can sometimes be co-opted and spun into negative riots, such as the BLM movement in the US
  - **Truancy:** Young people may use them as an excuse to get out of school, without actually caring about the cause
  - **Extremism:** Some extreme marches have tarnished the image of lawful protest

*"I feel like sometimes in marches violence or, like, antisocial behaviour, can sometimes happen because people feel like, 'oh, we're in a bigger group, I'm not gonna get singled out for my behaviour.' So sometimes people can use it as an excuse to, like, act in a wrong way..."*

*"I mean, what else can they really do? Like, there's not a lot of other stuff that this is, like, the most I think anyone can do except, like you just stop oil for instance. They take it too far. Like this is the place where it's seen the most about being hated on I'd say."*



Additionally, future customers are conflicted as to whether they and their peers should have the right to vote

## The Labour Party is seen as having 'inherited a bad deal', and future customers are wary that they need to wait and see if change can happen

- The new Labour government is perceived by future customers as having **'inherited a bad situation'** from the previous Tory government
- Many feel as though it will take a **long time for the government to be able to change things** and make an impact (on issues like the cost-of-living crisis etc.)
- They feel that manifestos can often just be a **series of promises**, and need to wait and see if change will actually occur
- However, future customers specifically wish for more action on the **climate crisis**

*"Even if they want to be left wing, I just don't think they really have the capacity to kind of have free will right now. They've inherited quite a bad situation and so they can't really veer away from sort of conservative policy and whatever."*

*"I think it's a little bit hard to say for the next five years, especially with government usually taking a bit longer, so there might be some economic benefits for us. But I think most of change will probably happen maybe in the next ten years instead of five years."*

## Future customers are excited at the prospect of voting and having their opinion heard, but many feel 16 may not be the right time

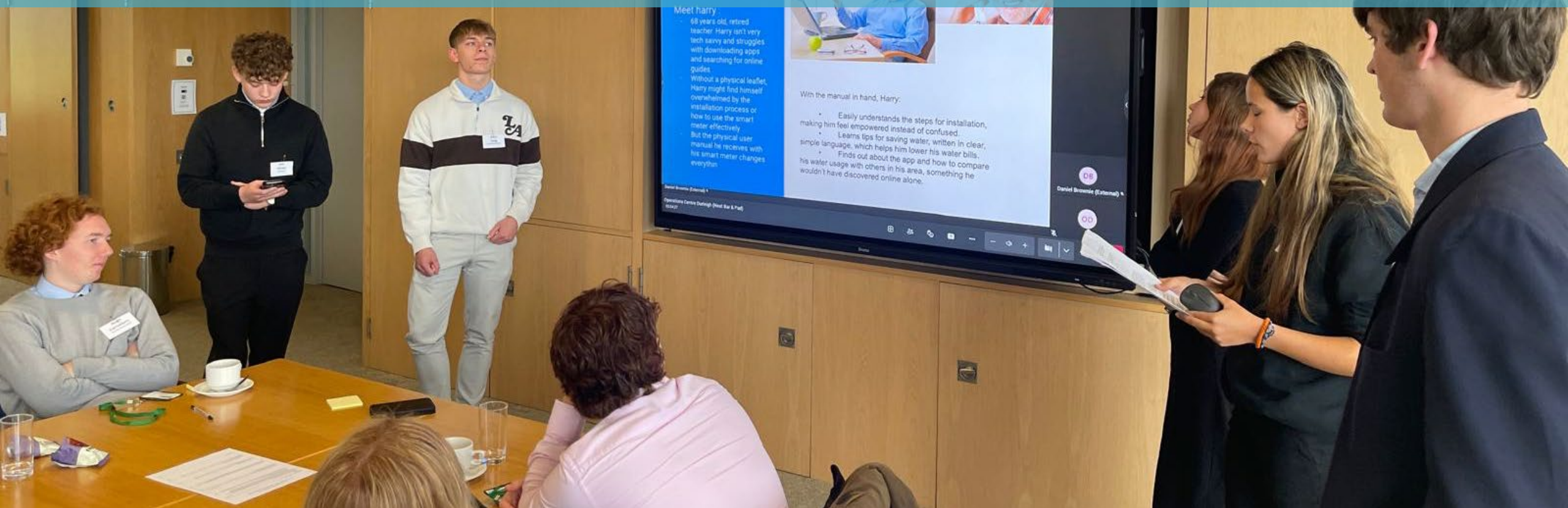
- Many future customers are **excited to be able to have their say in future elections**
- However, despite wanting to have more influence, **opinions are split** on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16
- Some express concerns that many 16- to 18-year-olds would have their voting behaviour **heavily influenced by their parents and teachers**
- There is the sentiment that 16- to 18-year-olds should be able to have the time to grow and understand themselves, before needing to make decisions around voting; **they are still developing their opinions and morals**
- Some are aware that some 16-year-olds **don't care as much or have as much of an opinion**

*"A lot of people do what their parents like...if 16- to 18-year-olds want to vote, then I think they will probably just go with who their family kind of talk about..."*

*"By 16, you're aware of the world around you, and I think what you do see the impacts of what decisions are made. I think the argument that sort of 16-year-olds don't know what they're on about, they're a bit stupid. I think it's a bit redundant because you can have a stupid 40-year-old like, it doesn't really matter."*



# Ensuring inclusive and effective strategies to reach all customers



Through a group exercise, future customers were tasked with developing an incident response plan that ensure all customers were supported during the incident

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SCENARIO


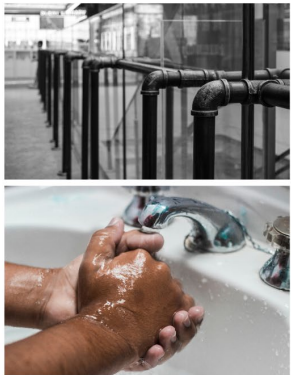
Imagine that there's been a significant water main burst in the middle of Bath, resulting in most households and businesses being without water.

**How would this impact you? What could / couldn't you continue to do during the incident?**

Now imagine that the water outage is going to continue for a number of days – potentially up to a week or more. When an incident like this happens, water companies implement an incident response plan, to help support those affected during the outage.

**Wessex Water need your help to support their customers during incidents like this.**

**How do you think this could be most effectively done?**



- Future customers were presented with a scenario where there had been a major water outage in Bath, with most customers being without water
- It was expected that the outage would last for up to a week or more
- Future customers were asked to consider the following:
  - What support do customers need during incidents like this?
  - How do we support at-risk customers, who may rely on their water supply?
  - Ideal messaging, and communications channels that should be used
  - Additional support that customers may require



### THE TASK

Wessex Water estimates that it will take 6 days before the water main can be fully repaired, and customers will have their water supply returned.

In your teams:

- Create an incident response plan for the event
  - How should Wessex Water support customers during this time?
  - How do they ensure that at-risk customers, who may rely on their water supply for various reasons (e.g. for a physical health condition such as psoriasis, or dialysis), are protected?
- Create a communications plan to effectively support customers during this time.
- Consider:
  - What messages will be most effective?
  - What images will be most effective?
  - What communication channels will you use? How frequently will you use post?
  - How to reach the digitally disengaged
  - What additional support or communications will at-risk customers require?
- Nominate a communications lead to feedback to the room and be prepared to justify the decisions you have made.

**You have 30 minutes to prepare your plan**



Future customers identified the ideal messaging and channels that should be used to communicate with customers

## Messaging & imagery



**Reassure, and allay any fears or panic:** Messaging should be reassuring in tone. Customers are likely to be stressed and/or confused, so it is important to ensure people do not panic or make misinformed decisions (which could lead to unnecessary problems or expenses)



**Consistent progress updates:** There is a strong need to ensure customers have access to the most up-to-date information at the time. Ensuring regular updates will also assist in helping customers remain calm, and plan ahead for the duration of the outage



**Take a 'community' approach:** Encourage customers to work alongside those in their community, and support those in need who Wessex Water may not be immediately aware of



**Be open and transparent:** Customers will be frustrated during an extended water outage, and it is important to acknowledge that. Providing honest updates (even if there is little change) lets customers know that work is going on in the background, and they have not been forgotten about

## Channels



**Wide-reaching, automatic messaging:** Important, early messaging should be wide-reaching, and automatic, to ensure effective dissemination. Using the emergency alert system (like during COVID) would be an effective means to do this



**SMS / Text messaging:** Allows for easy dissemination of lower urgency updates, to a majority of impacted customers



**Ground staff at water stations:** Having staff on hand allows for more tailored messaging, and for customers to feel like they are being heard. An on-ground presence can also be reassuring in situations like a water outage



**Emergency 24/7 hotline:** Having a hotline to answer queries 24/7 reassures customers that they will be able to access support whenever they need it.



Future customers highlight a number of ways Wessex Water can support everyone in the community

## Strategies to reach the digitally disengaged



**Having a hotline of experts to answer queries:** Allows those unable to access digital channels to access the information and support they need, when they need it



**Sending advisors to concentrated at-risk populations, e.g. care homes:** Provides assurances that vulnerable customers are being taken care of, and not falling through the cracks



**Communications in analogue formats:** Sending out letters, with braille options, will enable further reach to the digitally disengaged



**Work with local authorities:** Connecting with local authorities (such as the police, fire department, local hospitals etc.) will enable a joined-up approach, facilitating greater access to support and communication

## Additional support for at-risk customers



**Water drops:** Wessex Water should set up water stations around the impacted areas, and deliver bottled water to impacted homes and city centres, so that customers are able to easily access water



**Sanitation options:** Provide options such as porta-potties in town centres, and sanitation products such as wet wipes and sanitiser for customers to collect.



**Regular updates:** Ensure at-risk customers get clear updates to prevent the spread of misinformation



**Filtration pumps:** Set up pumps at beaches and promenades to filter water



# Future customers were given a 'persona' of a customer who might need extra help

They were tasked with identifying mitigations that Wessex Water could employ to assist these customers



- **Mark**, 51, short-term wheelchair user
- Lives alone in an urban neighbourhood in a flat
- Low contact with family and friends



- **Shay**, 21, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression and anxiety
- Lives with housemates in a student house
- Prefers texting to calling, busy



- **Sarah**, 38, recent vision loss
- Lives with partner and 10-year-old son
- Low confidence with digital devices



- **Alex**, 25, autism spectrum disorder and ADHD
- Lives in supported living and has a support worker
- Needs structure and routine



- **Priya**, 37, limited English language
- Lives with husband and daughter
- Low familiarity with bills, devices and processes





Issues	Mitigations suggested by future customers
<b>These are temporary but pressing issues</b>	Solutions need to be both quick and short-term
<b>Water meter inaccessible in hallway</b>	Temporary mobile app for remote water control
<b>Limited access to water controls</b>	Install temporary, accessible taps and ramps
<b>Temporary inability to work</b>	Short-term financial aid or temporary payment plans
<b>Short-term reliance on carer or partner</b>	Brief training for carers on meter access and usage
<b>Unable to address urgent repairs (e.g., burst pipes)</b>	Temporary direct line to Wessex Water for quick fixes



- 51, short-term wheelchair user
- Lives alone in an urban neighbourhood in a flat
- Low contact with family and friends



Issues	Mitigations suggested by future customers
<p><b>Finds it difficult to access water meter – their bedroom is on the top floor and water meter in the basement and they have physical health issues</b></p>	<p>Wessex Water could make their water meter more accessible with a mobile water meter or an app</p>
<p><b>Isolated – has low contact with friends and family</b></p>	<p>Could there be some bill paying delegated to other housemates or even university?</p>
<p><b>Doesn't like phone calls, has mental health issues</b></p>	<p>Could have a personal profile on an app so that Wessex Water are aware of these needs and issues</p> <p>Wessex Water could contact through messages rather than phone calls</p>



- 21, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression and anxiety
- Lives with housemates in a student house
- Prefers texting to calling, busy



Issues	Mitigations suggested by future customers
<p><b>Recent vision loss – does not know how to read braille or use voice to text / screen reader software</b></p>	<p>Could be given a support worker who could help her to access braille and software</p> <p>Wessex Water could provide 1:1 tutorials and stay in touch with her so that she can learn how to navigate being a water customer with vision loss</p>
<p><b>Cannot work currently</b></p>	<p>Financial support needed</p>
<p><b>Does not have smart meters</b></p>	<p>These might help her / her family to access water costs – could get some installed</p>
<p><b>Has family support nearby</b></p>	<p>Encourage accessing family support</p>
<p><b>Her existing appliances might not be aligned with her current needs</b></p>	<p>Might need adaptations</p>



- 38, recent vision loss
- Lives with partner and 10 year old son
- Low confidence with digital devices



Issues	Mitigations suggested by future customers
<p><b>Has problems understanding or paying bills</b></p>	<p>Specialised support worker from Wessex Water</p> <p>Wessex Water could brief Alex / her general support worker on things that can go wrong</p> <p>Could work with her tablet and have the bills appear in an app she's familiar with</p>
<p><b>Repair work and disruption to services could be distressing can be disruptive and stressful</b></p>	<p>Advanced warning could come not just in a letter but via an in-person briefing with a support worker</p> <p>Opportunity for her to make plans and go elsewhere, and could even offer her a space to go</p> <p>Repairs could also be scheduled for hours that she's out of the house (she lives in supported living)</p>
<p><b>Limited contact with family and so less of a support network</b></p>	<p>Wessex Water to take on greater responsibility to be supportive</p> <p>Emergency contacts could be set up</p>



- 25, autism spectrum disorder and ADHD
- Lives in supported living and has a support worker
- Needs structure and routine
- Has a tablet that she uses often



Issues	Mitigations suggested by future customers
<b>Currently unemployed – seeking work – impact on financials</b>	Subsidised bills
<b>Language barrier</b>	<p>A communications person from the company could help her translate, or Wessex Water could pass on communications to her husband so he can translate</p> <p>Ensure correspondence is in a language that Priya understands</p>
<b>Lack of knowledge in tax and bills</b>	Video tutorials could teach about bills and taxes
<b>Struggles with new technologies</b>	<p>Someone from Wessex Water could explain water technologies to her</p> <p>This could be over the phone or video call using a translator</p>



- 37, limited English language
- Lives with husband and daughter
- Low familiarity with bills, devices and processes





## Communications channels

Future customers suggest a range of communications channels that would help support customers with additional needs:

- Temporary **direct phone lines for emergencies**
- An app that forms **a hub for all content**
- Options to **delegate communications** to emergency contacts / relatives
- Options that **do not require talking** to a Wessex Water representative directly
- **Translators**, to provide support to ESL customers



## Types of financial support

Future customers recognise that customers who have additional needs would often benefit from a **reduced water bill, or the ability to pay in instalments**

For some, this will be **ongoing** financial support, while others will only need it **temporarily**



## Education

Future customers see a need for Wessex Water to provide educational content to support customers with additional needs. This includes:

- **Training for carers** (both long- and short-term), so they can help customers in their care manage their account with Wessex Water
- Educational support for those who will **suddenly have to engage with Wessex Water in a different way** (e.g. due to sudden loss of vision)
- **Video tutorials** teaching the use of smart meters etc.



## Additional resources

There are a range of additional resources future customers feel customers with additional needs could benefit from:

- **Temporary physical support** (e.g. ramps, handrails to access showers etc.), following a physical injury
- **Smart meters**, so those less physically able can still access their meter information
- **Ability to schedule maintenance during non-regular hours**, to help neurodiverse customers manage their routines



# Influence and engagement within the water sector



# Future customers feel Wessex Water can help to amplify their voices

Most appreciate being able to have their voice heard as part of the panel, but feel that this could be embedded more throughout their entire school year



## Wessex Water Ambassadors

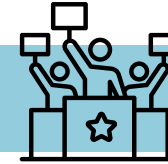
Future customers suggested that Wessex Water could establish an **'Ambassador Programme'**, whereby students from each school in the region work with Wessex Water over an extended period of time.

These students would form a connection between the schools and the organisation, **fostering increased engagement with, and understanding of, the water sector.** They should also be able to feed into work programmes and initiatives within Wessex Water.

Such a programme could also be embedded within the school curriculum, including education activities that inform young people about the water sector and the issues facing it.

*"People apply to be ambassadors, and they sort of explain to Wessex Water why they should be an ambassador and represent their school and Wessex Water. And then they collect data and, like, their schools opinions and stuff. So, they got to be dedicated to it, obviously. And then if there was an issue that came up, there's got to be a lead ambassador as well from Wessex Water, which they then email them about the issue or something. And then, like I said, like maybe once a year or something they come together in person. Yeah. Discussing stuff. Sort of like a trade union or something like that."*

*"Maybe like, do some more school visits and stuff to kind of gather opinions that young people have of them and the things that young people think that they could help solve the important issues that they perceive."*



## Youth panels & other opportunities

Events such as the Young People's Panel, and the Graduate Apprenticeship Open Day, are seen as effective ways to engage with future customers.

- As with other events, it's important to demonstrate to future customers that they would have **direct access to decision makers** and show evidence that they do in fact have influence over decisions made within the organisation.
- For example, many future customers express an interest in seeing how Wessex Water will **implement their ideas in the future.**

Some participants also feel Wessex Water could imbed insights from young people on a more regular and in-depth basis, by:

- Establishing a **youth parliament / assembly**, particularly to ensure a youth voice on community issues and environmental approaches

*"I think it's good when they put young people in the speaking point. I think it's certainly refreshing because I think you'll find there's a pattern where young people talk on specific problems."*





Amongst top-of-mind associations with Wessex Water (water, drinking, etc.), some future customers mention **sewage, leaks, and the environment**

This is echoed in comments from the school survey, with many mentioning hearing about sewage and pollution in the news, or having negative views about the water industry more generally

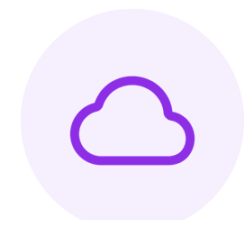
*"Because there is always water pollution in Poole Harbour (I sail) I have been very ill from it before, I feel like my trust in the company was betrayed because of that."*

*"River pollution, don't know much about how good they are."*

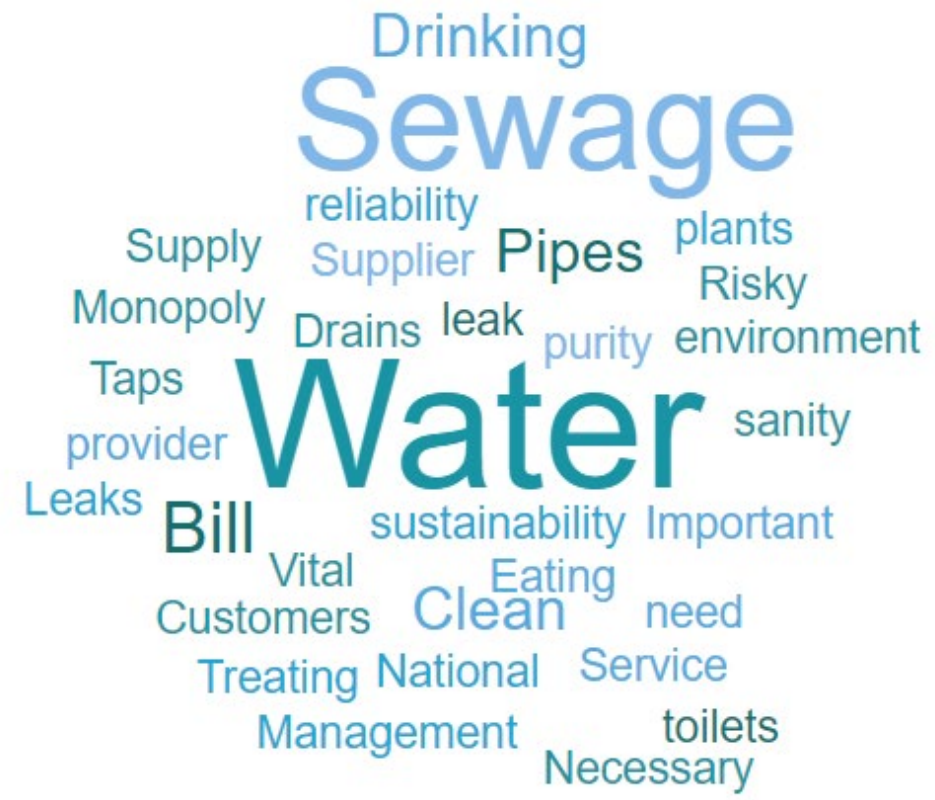
*"Sewage Pollution seen in the news."*

*"Rumours of sewage in water."*

*"I feel Wessex Water are a far more responsible water company than some others, but I still feel that there are many problems with water companies in general."*



What three words come to mind when you think about Wessex Water?



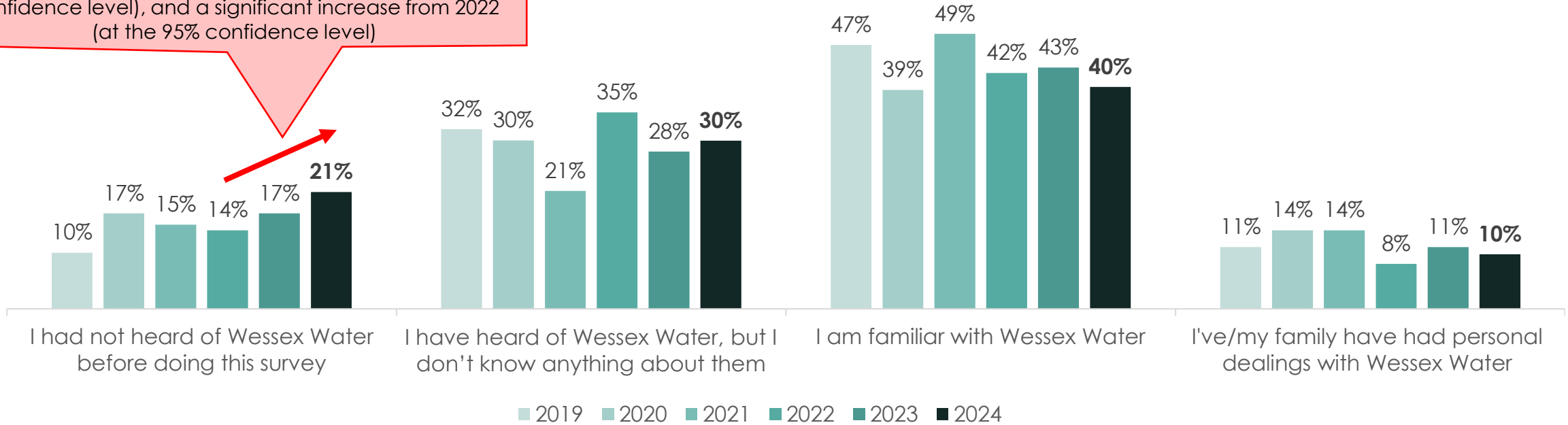
This is despite no overall change in levels of personal dealings with Wessex Water, indicating link to brand awareness



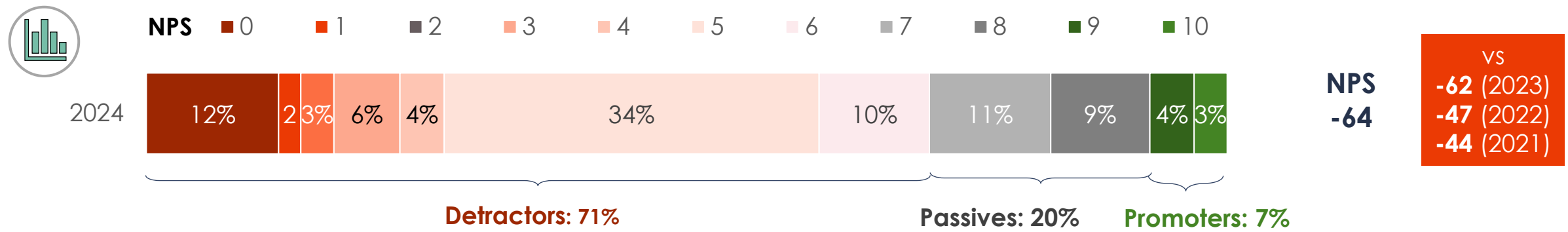
## Which of the following reflects your awareness of Wessex Water?

The proportion who say they had not heard of Wessex Water before has reached the highest level to date and has trended up since 2022

This is a significant increase from 2023 (at the 90% confidence level), and a significant increase from 2022 (at the 95% confidence level)



Many Passives or Detractors mention having a limited understanding of the work being done by Wessex Water. Promoting environmental efforts could help to increase this score in the future



## Reasons for being a detractor

- The majority of detractors **do not feel they have enough knowledge** to say whether Wessex Water is a good company or not
- Those who do, typically mention environmental issues **such as pollution due to sewage**

"I honestly do not know enough information about them to give an accurate description to someone else if anything I would be the person who is having it described to me."

"Due to irresponsible behaviour in relation to the environment such as sewerage."

"Provide water to my house, it works nothing seems to go wrong, but water isn't a topic of frequent conversation."

## Reasons for being a promoter

- Promoters reference a range or reasons for their positive perceptions of Wessex Water:
  - **Hearing positive things** from their networks
  - Seeing staff do a **good job within communities**
  - Understanding the work being done to **mitigate environmental impacts**
  - Having a **good water quality within their homes**

"Because I have only heard good things."

"I've seen them around Somerset before and they are considerate of the locals and efficient at their job."

"They are reliable and good at solving any issues. I know they take an active stance in considering the impact that their business has on the environment and the collective duty to take care of the earth."

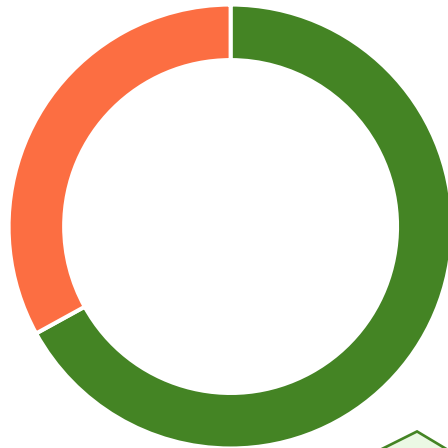


They like being able to monitor and compare their data, as well as having easy access to their information



## Use of apps

Do not use digital platforms **33%**



Do use digital platforms **67%**

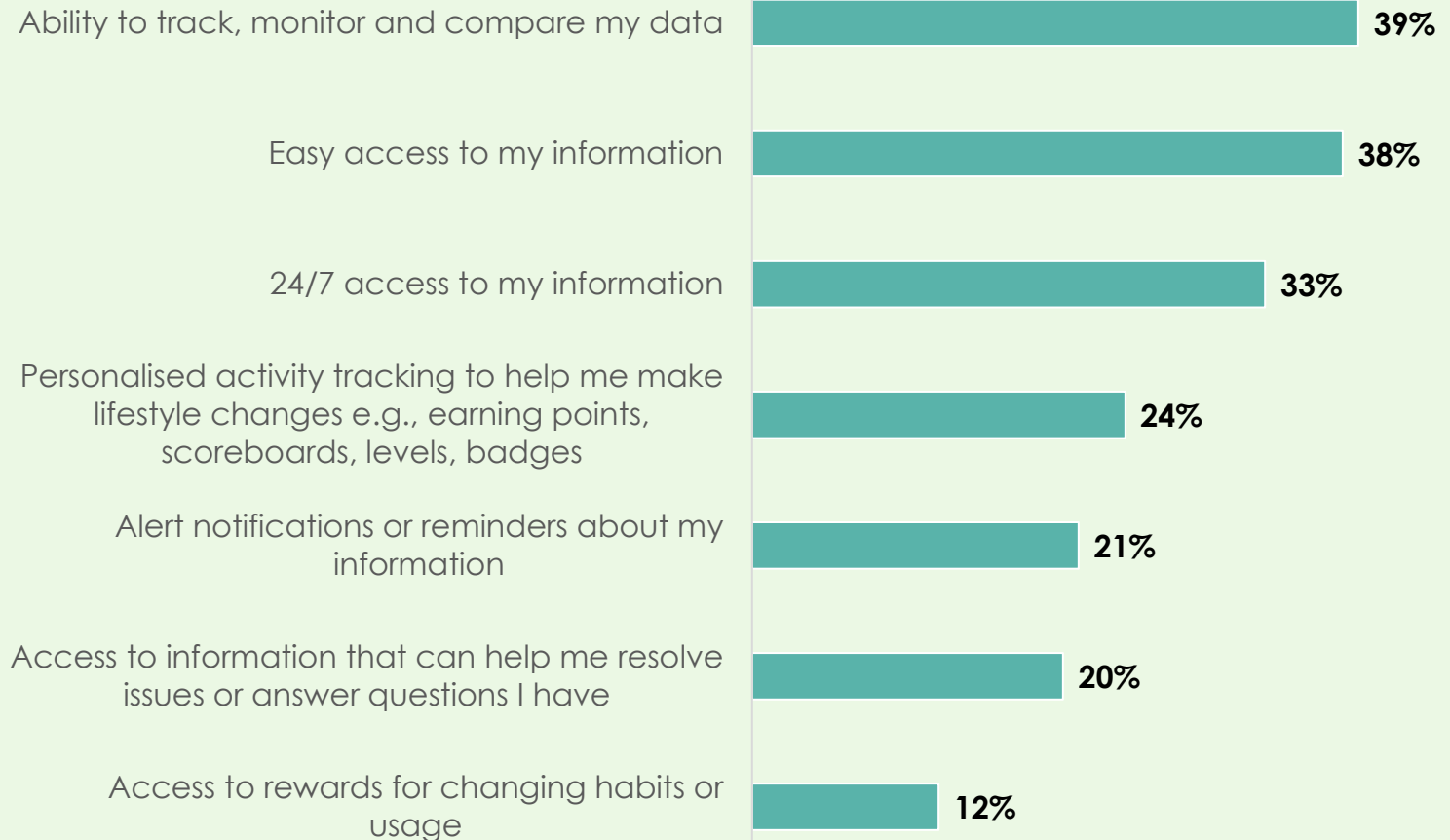
## Types of apps used

Financial – e.g., banking apps, Money Manager **48%**

Personal habits – e.g., productivity apps **39%**

Fitness or wellbeing – e.g., Fitbit, Strava **26%**

## Preferred features of lifestyle apps

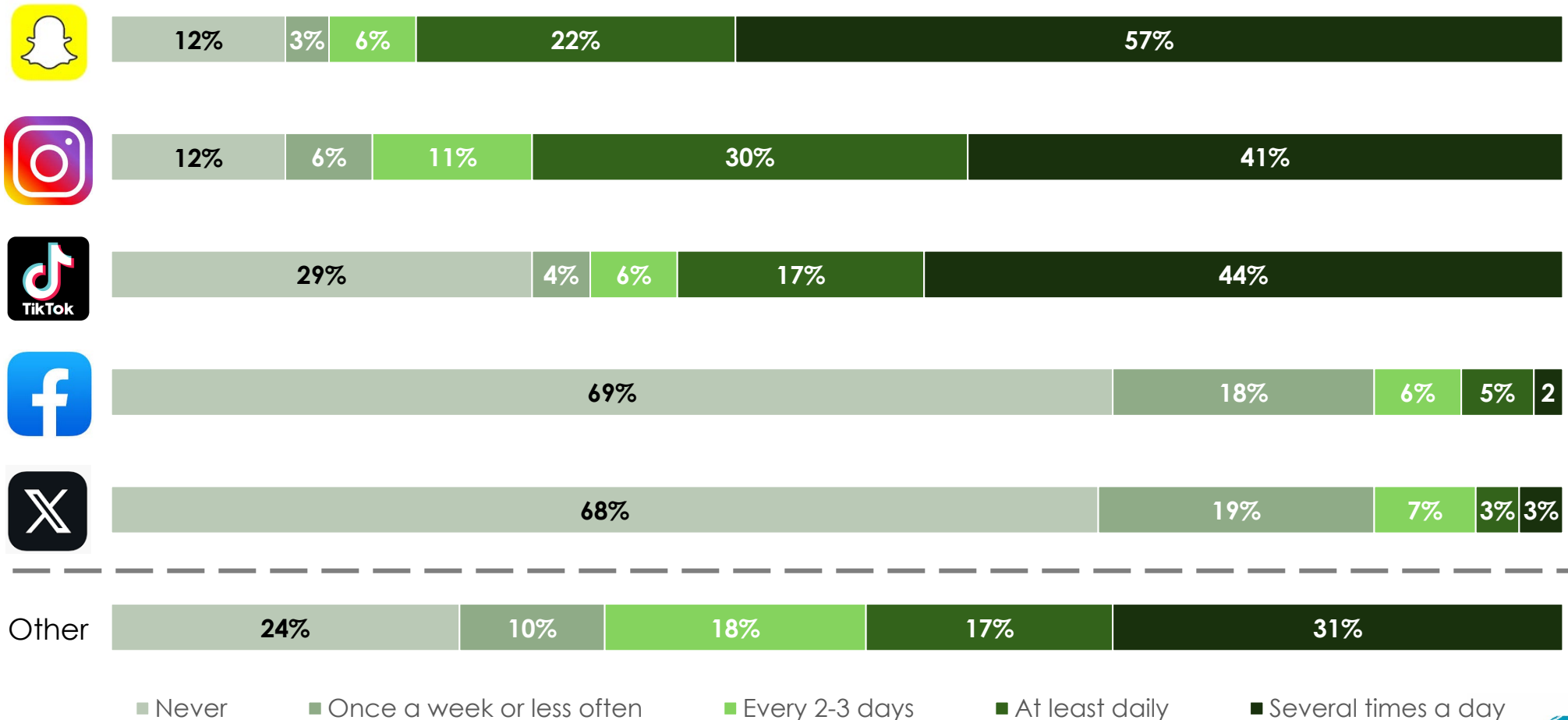


Q12. Do you currently use any digital platforms (mobile apps or website portals) to monitor or track your lifestyle activities? For example, this could be apps like Strava, banking apps, or other products Base: 721 (2024); Q13. Which digital platforms (mobile apps or website portals) do you currently use to monitor or track your lifestyle activities?; What features of these platforms do you like the most? Base: 484 (2024)



Snapchat is used at least once daily by 8 in 10 future customers, and is a core way for this generation to communicate – all teams involved in the 2024 panel used Snapchat as their primary means of communication with each other

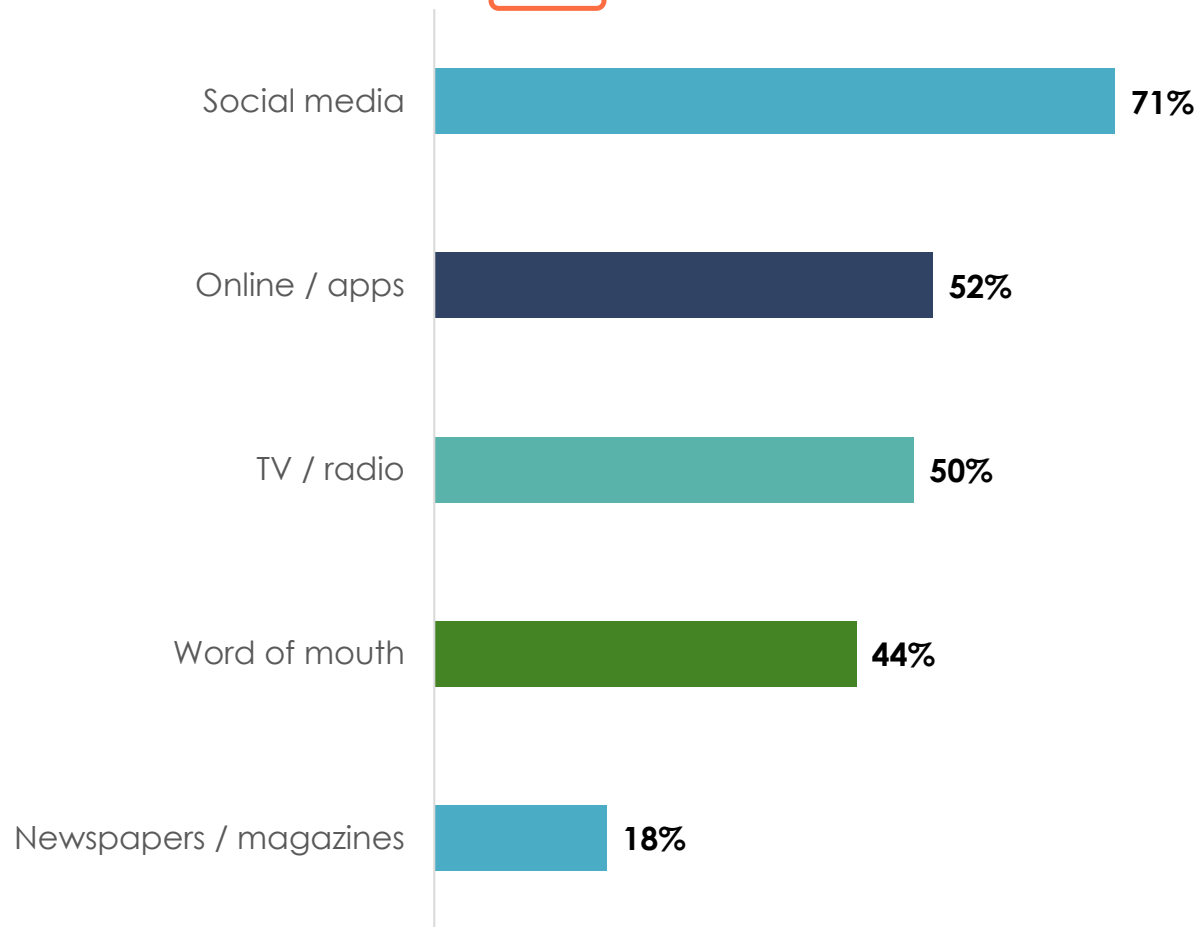
## How often do you use the following social media platforms?



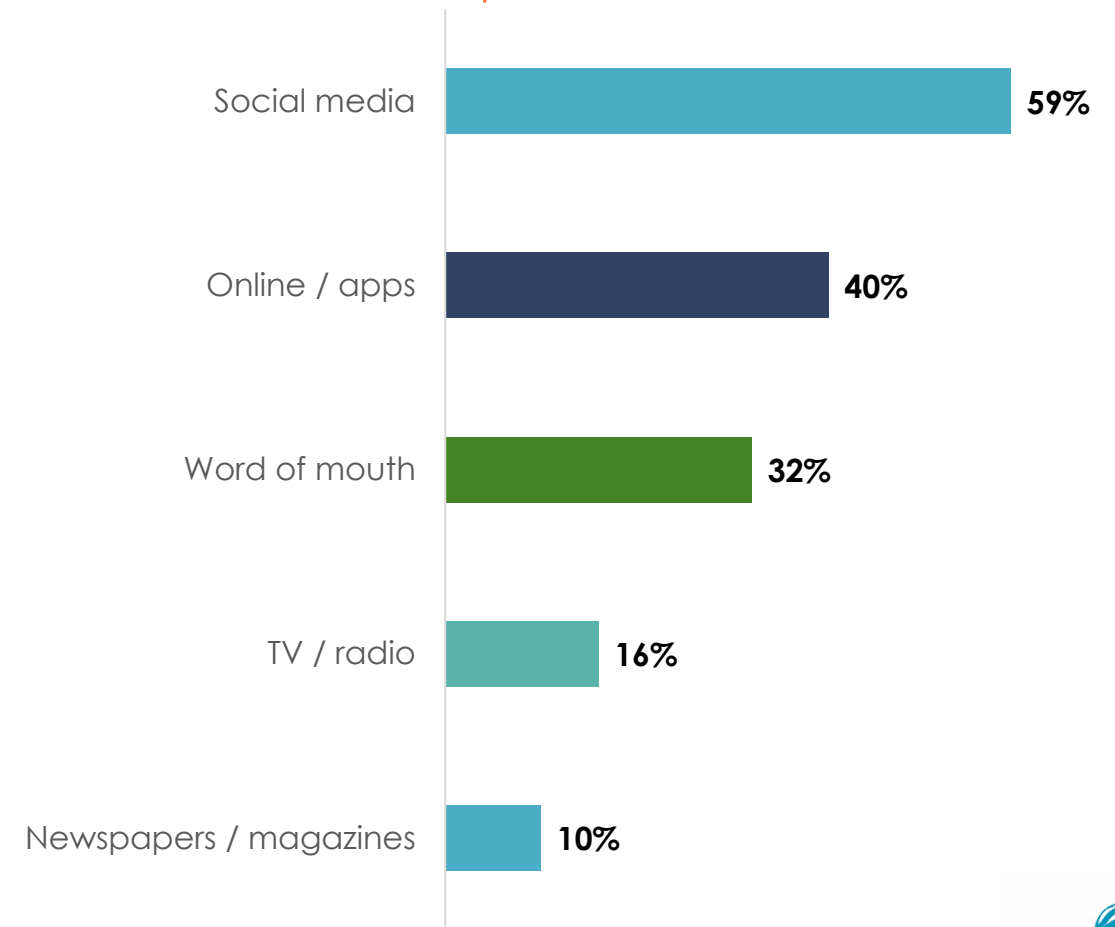
But future customers are more likely to get information on brands and companies by word of mouth than TV / radio – which is not the same as where they get information on news and current affairs.



## Information sources for news and media



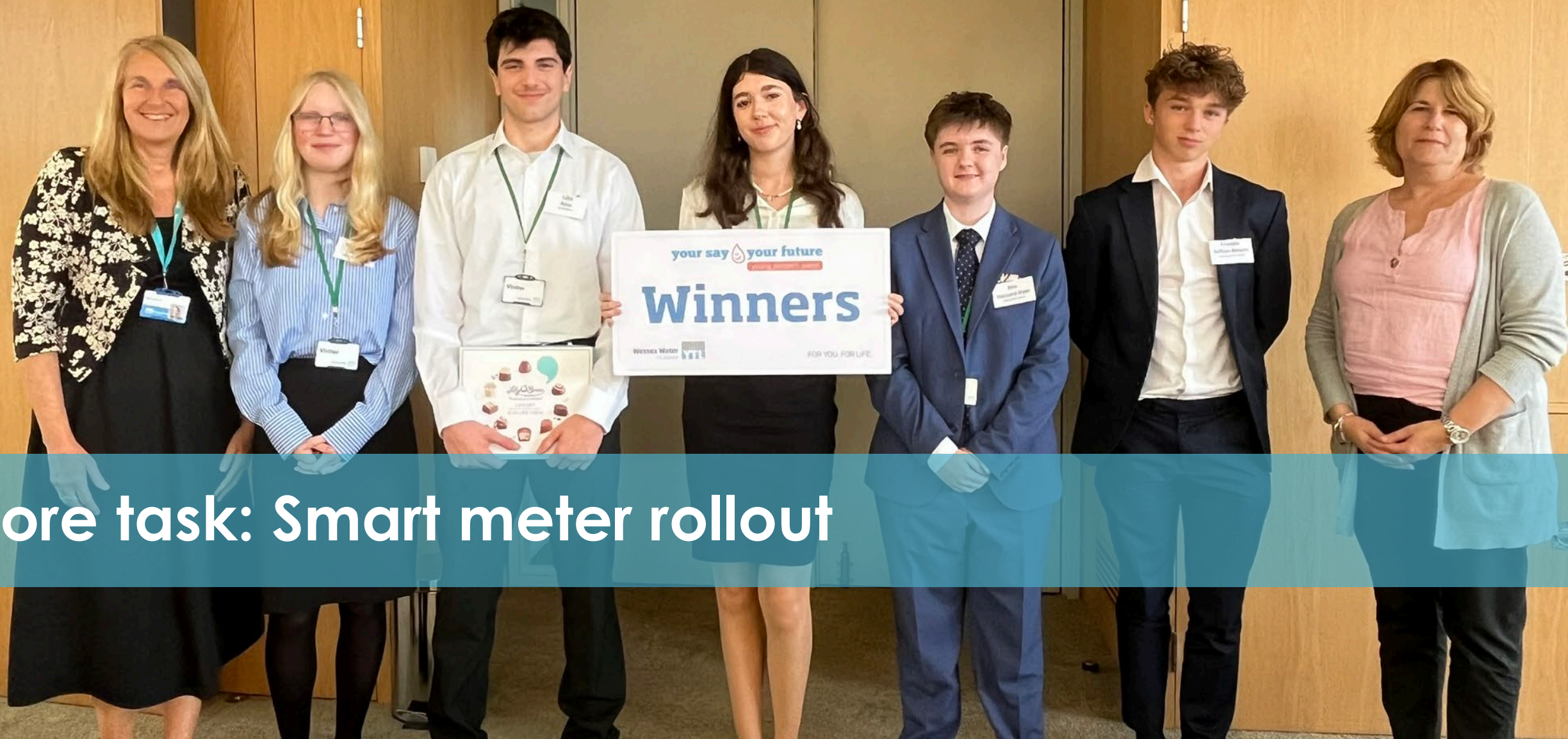
## Information sources for brands / companies



Q10. Thinking about where you get various types of information from: where do you go to get information on news and current affairs? Q11. And where do you go to get information about brands / companies? Base: 721 (2024)




# Core task: Smart meter rollout



Future customers were briefed on their core task, and split into teams


### THE STORY SO FAR...

- Our plan to kick off the smart meter installs and associated customer engagement is in full swing. **We're structuring the customer journey around 6 key elements:**




- Development of a good customer offering to meet expectations for most customers and deliver water savings based on:
  - Existing services** – the way we already do things
  - Customer insight** – what we know customers want and think
  - Market insight** – benchmarking other companies and service providers


Comms materials




Field teams




Billing



Digital



Customer queries



What could we do next to enhance our smart meter services from good to excellent?

To prepare them for their strategy development and pitch tasks, students were given a briefing about Wessex Water's smart water meter rollout, including:

- Context and work to date
- What Wessex Water hasn't considered yet
- The current plan for a good customer offering

Students were then tasked to develop a pitch to present their best ideas for rolling out smart meters to Wessex Water's customers, including:

- Research on their target audience
- Key messaging to utilise
- Methods of communication
- Incentives to encourage engagement
- How to ensure the rollout was accessible to all customer groups

### THE BRIEF: DEVELOP EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES 54

🏆

**Your task is to adopt the role of Wessex Water's Smart Meter Rollout engagement team and create a strategy which ensures a successful rollout of smart meters for all Wessex Water customers.**

🏆

- Wessex Water are always looking to continuously improve their services and so we'd like your help to design the next phase of enhancements to their smart metering programme. **Your task is to develop strategies that could lead to greater water savings and/or improved customer service throughout the smart metering journey.** Your strategies should include at least two of the following:
  - Incentives** such as non-financial rewards (e.g. prize draws or community goal contributions) and special tariffs (e.g. prices that change depending on time of day or year, or after household use passes a certain threshold)
  - How to engage with all customers groups**
  - Inclusivity:** Ensuring the smart metering journey is **inclusive for all customers**, particularly those who need extra help
- Your team needs to decide which of the above areas you will feature in your strategy.
- You do not need to include all of them but should aim to create a well-rounded plan covering several areas and emphasising the elements which you feel take highest priority.



The presentation task reveals what the next generation feels is key to focus on to encourage the adoption of smart meters. This includes education, both digital and physical engagement, and supplementary incentives

## Theme

### 1) Education should be a core component of an inclusive rollout



### 2) App-based engagement as a hub for all smart meter content



## Solutions and insights

- **Education** needs to cover both the **need for smart water meters** (i.e. highlighting that there is a water crisis), and **how smart water meters work**
- Customers need to be shown the **benefits** of using a smart meter and the **impacts** it will have, both long term and short term
- Educational engagement should **start young** – targeting school children and younger families will foster ongoing awareness and understanding of the need to conserve water
- The introduction of an app allows **full realisation of the benefits** of smart water meter technology
- Apps enable the **easy dissemination of updated content** (e.g. adding new languages for accessibility purposes), in addition to allowing customers to access **all of their information from one place**
- Apps will appeal to a **younger audience** – indicating sustained growth in engagement with the app as future customers become customers
- Allows access to **real time water usage and costs saved**, which is a key concern for customers



The presentation task reveals what the next generation feels is key to focus on to encourage the adoption of smart meters. This includes education, both digital and physical engagement, and supplementary incentives

## Theme

### 3) Incentivise uptake (via rewards and competition)



### 4) Physical engagement is just as important as digital engagement



## Solutions and insights

- All teams felt that providing incentives to customers was **necessary to increase adoption** of smart water meters and engagement with water-saving behaviours
- The suggested incentives typically take the form of **points earned by meeting certain water-saving thresholds**. Points can then be redeemed for partner rewards, such as Costa Coffee vouchers, entries into prize draws, free swimming lessons, or discounts on eco-friendly products like cleaning supplies
- Incentives should also tap into peoples' **competitive natures** – by gamifying saving water, and following apps such as Duolingo and Strava, in which customers can see how they **rank compared to friends** and neighbours, or can establish a daily 'streak'
- While apps and online campaigns work for many customers, it is important to have a **strong physical / offline offering**, in order to garner buy-in from digitally disconnected groups
- Physical assets are **easily accessible by all customers**, allowing for a consistent experience, especially in areas with limited internet access
- Any campaign developed as part of the rollout should also **leverage community networks**, and include family events, to **boost engagement from harder-to-reach audiences**




### Ensuring an Inclusive Rollout

It's vital Wessex Water ensure that their smart meter rollout is inclusive for all of their customers, this will help customers feel valued and seen by the company, it will also make this change a lot more swift and easy for them to comply with


Some methods to use to ensure this could be:

- Arranging a time for families/carers when the kids are at school, to talk through the smart meter and install it, therefore they have no distractions and can fully understand and focus
- Have longer instalment sessions for elderly customers, they may find it harder to understand so it's important they don't feel rushed and have the adequate time to understand the product
- Arrange a detailed phone call with all customers prior to installation to discuss whether they have any specific needs that should be catered for to help make the process easier and more comfortable for them



### Engagement Strategies

- Personalised communication can be an incredibly useful tool to help young families feel considered and supported by Wessex Water because a message system such as SMS is much easier for busy people to view and access than something like an email that young families are likely to be swarmed with and they are likely to ignore
- A local event such as a talk held at a school is highly probable to be useful for busy families with young children as parent don't have to go out of their way to attend the local event and they can give and receive feedback allowing them to feel heard
- Implementing user-friendly platforms that can be easily accessed by young families that are probably feeling overwhelmed by changes in technology and would enjoy an easy-to-use platform
- Creating partnerships with community organisations that young people often interact with in an easy and effective way to reach young families that often feel overlooked already




Highlights & key insights	The strategy
<p>Inclusive rollout to boost reputation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An inclusive smart meter rollout ensures the installation process is <b>effective for all customers</b>. This process involves arranging <b>specific times for families or carers to be able to engage</b> when children are at school to avoid distractions, and providing longer installation sessions for elderly customers to ensure they <b>fully understand the product</b></li> </ul>
<p>Personalised communication and incentives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Personalised communication</b> such as SMS messaging and phone calls, rather than emails which may then be ignored</li> <li>• <b>User friendly platforms</b> for those lacking digital confidence, as well as the development of an app that could reach a larger audience and <b>provide incentives, such as free swimming lessons</b></li> </ul>
<p>In-person events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organising local events to allow people to <b>give and receive feedback about smart meters</b>, a suggestion that was based on the responses from case studies</li> <li>• Additionally provides a forum to <b>educate customers on smart meters</b></li> </ul>

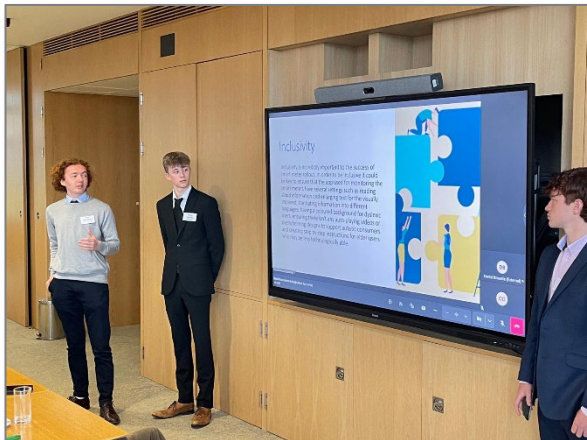


## How to engage with young families.

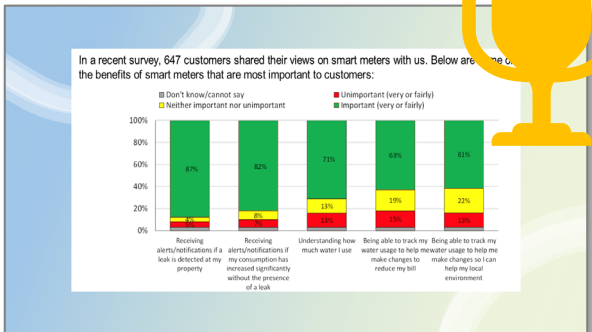
- We feel that young families would be engaged more by the water meter if they felt directly involved. Firstly, we think that a beach clean on one of the Wessex water area beaches such as Weymouth would provide a fun day out for the family.
- Whilst here there would be advertising from Wessex water about the new smart meter app, also providing water bottles with the Wessex water labels on to increase brand awareness and increase downloads on the app.
- There could be a small eco stage/hint with music that you can only enter after providing proof such as a barcode of the app downloaded on your phone. Further boosting engagement from these families.

## How the points can be spent

- Collaborations with other brands would not only increase involvement with the project but could also aid in the struggle of inflation many homes are facing.
- We hope that during these collaborations that the public will be able to see their physical benefit (getting vouchers for food shops) thus boosting the responsiveness of the community towards the water meter rollout.
- For example: If customers reach the certain goal of points, they can redeem vouchers/points from potential partners such as Tesco or Costa.



Highlights & key insights	The strategy
<p>Use incentives to reduced financial burden</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use incentives <b>such as vouchers to ease financial pressure</b> for customers, with a <b>system based on points</b> that customers earn by saving water. Other incentives include environmental incentives through educating customers about the environmental benefits of saving water</li> </ul>
<p>Engage with the disengaged, e.g. young families and climate anxious</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with customers who are typically disengaged such as young families and climate anxious adults by <b>providing beach cleans</b>. This engages young families by providing a fun day out for the family. Climate anxious adults can be engaged through <b>improving transparency and allowing for customers voices to be heard</b> through reciprocal communication</li> <li>Promote awareness of smart meters by focusing on the <b>environmental benefits</b> as well as highlighting everyone's <b>shared responsibilities for the climate</b></li> </ul>
<p>Develop an app with a wide range of accessibility features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an accessible app with <b>adjustable features</b> for those with sensory and cognitive impairments to improve inclusivity</li> </ul>

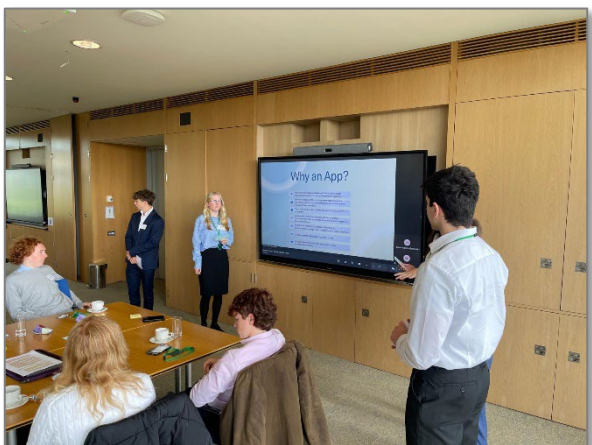


### Marketing and incentives for 'MyMeter App'

**Leaderboards**

- A leaderboard could be an effective way to create competition between customers to save water.
- A customer's place in the leaderboard will be based on how much water they have saved with the customer who has saved the most water being in first place.
- I took inspiration from apps such as Duolingo and Flora which use leaderboards to keep their customers invested and consistent with their app.
- An add-on to leaderboards could be individual leagues which a customer can progress through to get onto another league such as the gold league to diamond league. One league is a step up from the last.

Wessex Water



## Highlights & key insights

Development of the 'MyMeter' app, which should be fully accessible and inclusive

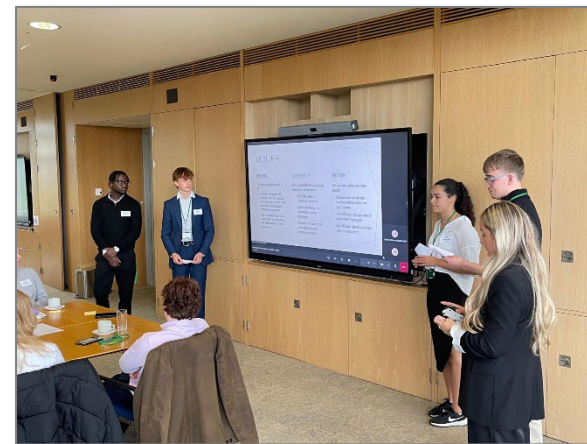
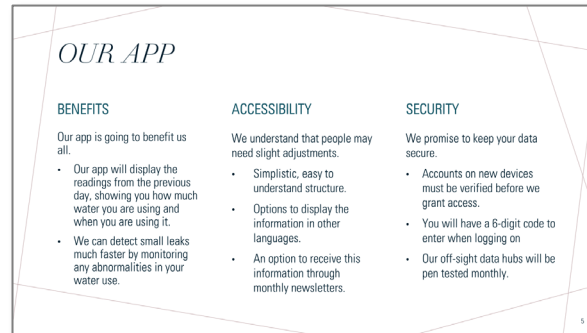
- Create an app called "MyMeter" to appeal to a growing use of mobile phones in the area, with a **focus on notifying users and personalisation**
- Through the app, extra support for individuals with disabilities can be **flagged privately to Wessex Water**, allowing Wessex Water to provide optimal support

Use the app to deliver incentives as well as communications

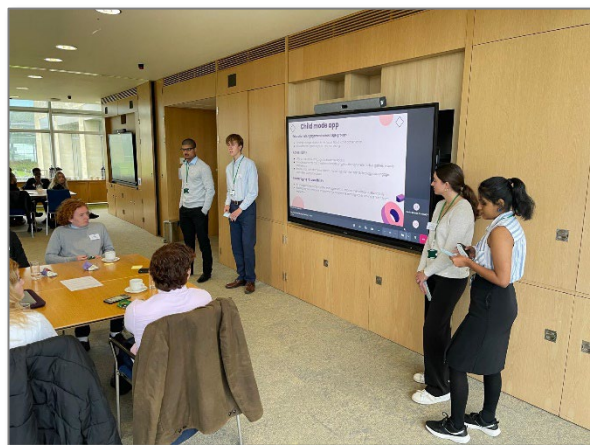
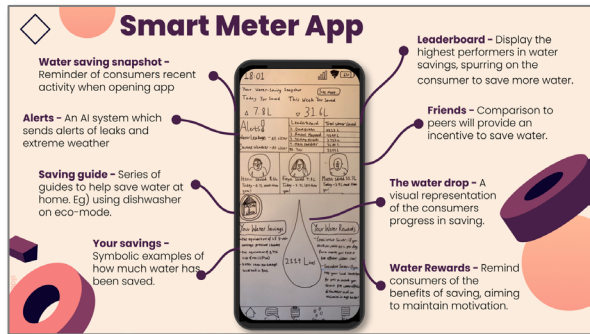
- The app allows for communication with Wessex Water, while features such as streaks will allow **users to see how much water they have saved** as well as how much water other customers have saved
- Streaks, daily goals and leaderboards operate as an **incentive by motivating customers to save more water**

Engage with audiences through a multi-channel approach

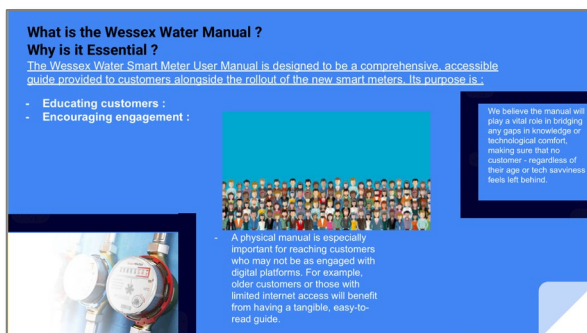
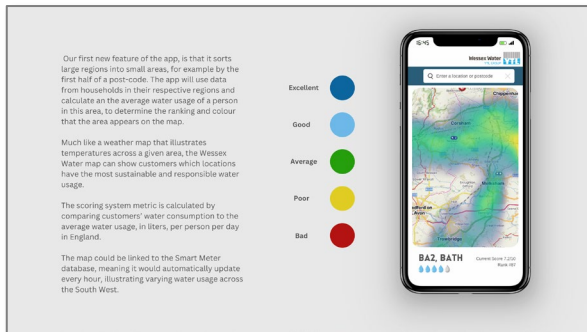
- Implementation of educational campaigns on television to **engage older audiences**



Highlights & key insights	The strategy
<p>Use an accessible app to track water usage and leaks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an app that will display water use over time while being able to <b>identify leaks through tracking abnormalities</b>. The app allows for <b>customisation</b>, making it accessible to individuals who require the app in different languages, while also being secure</li> </ul>
<p>Offer other forms of communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other communication methods are made available for individuals who <b>may not be adept with technology</b>, such as the elderly and individuals with cognitive impairments</li> </ul>
<p>Use incentives and reducing environmental harm to engage customers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach net zero, using renewable energy in Wessex Water buildings and using electric vehicles for installations and repairs to <b>engage climate anxious customers</b> – make this a core part of communicating with this segment</li> <li>• Incentives such as <b>free repairs, events held for houses with smart meters, newsletters, and a points system</b> where points can be exchanged in shops and restaurants to improve smart meter uptake</li> </ul>



Highlights & key insights	The strategy
<p>Use a social media campaign to boost engagement with smart meters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The social media campaign, including <b>newspaper ads to engage older customers</b>, allows for promotion of water meters. Additionally, collaborate with an <b>eco-friendly celebrity</b> to boost smart meter installation rates and engagement.</li> </ul>
<p>Create of an accessible smart meter app that targets both adults and children, teaching children about responsibility when it comes to saving water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an app that allows <b>individuals to compare the amount of water saved by each household</b> to others in their communities / networks</li> <li>The app is <b>customisable</b>, allowing for accessibility by making other languages available. The app is also <b>accessible to children</b> by including games that simplify the complex concepts regarding water metering</li> </ul>
<p>Incorporate incentives relating to competitive spirit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The comparison feature on the app acts as an <b>incentive by tapping into their competitive spirit</b>. Incorporate a child mode, which teaches younger children about water conservation strategies</li> <li><b>Contests for water conservation and tell a friend schemes</b> act as an incentive to save water</li> </ul>



Highlights & key insights	The strategy
<p>Develop a physical manual</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The physical manual, that is more accessible to the digitally excluded, explains how the smart meter works and encourages readers to download and engage with the app</li> </ul>
<p>Create a Wessex Water app</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Wessex Water app shows <b>regional water usage levels</b> and categorises them as excellent through to bad, and <b>ranks areas</b>, presenting a <b>leaderboard to create an incentive to save water</b></li> <li>Other incentives include <b>10% off your water bill</b> if your area is in the top 3 of the leaderboard for a prolonged time</li> </ul>
<p>Increase accessibility of the app</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The app includes <b>different languages</b> to increase accessibility</li> </ul>





# Conclusions

1

Future customers are feeling the pressure of their increased responsibilities as new adults, but also feeling like they are still seen as children by other adults. They feel at an impasse; being asked to **solve the wicked problems of the world yet not being given the chance to have an impact** (due to having to focus on school and their plans for the future)

2

Future customers feel they have a **limited ability to influence change** and decision making within their communities and society-at-large. They have the most influence within their schools, but even this is at the whim of the faculty. They encourage Wessex Water to **continue giving them a voice**, with suggestions to embed an ambassador programme throughout the entire school year

3

Future customers did not report one singular pressing environmental concern, as there has been in previous years – **instead they are cognisant of all facets of the climate crisis**, perhaps indicating more widespread awareness of the impacts of climate change

4

Social media is **strongly embedded in the lives of young people**. Indeed, they use social media to communicate with their peers, as an information source and research tool, and as part of their activism by amplifying the voices of other creators. Engaging in this space is key to engaging with young people but **needs to be done authentically** (and not be 'cringe') in order to have an impact

5

The smart meter rollout task highlighted what future customers expect from Wessex Water:

- A strong focus on educating customers on the need for, and benefits of, smart meters
- App-based interactivity, which forms a one-stop-shop
- Incentives utilising a points system, but also leveraging peoples' competitive natures
- Physical touchpoints to supplement the digital focus



# Appendix



Excellent

Score	Day 1	Day 2
10	3	4
9	6	6
8	9	7
7	6	5
6	3	2
5	1	-
4	-	-
3	-	-
2	-	-
1	-	-
0	-	-

DAY 2

Ave 8.2

DAY 1

Ave 7.9

- **Presentations were an enjoyable part of Day 2**, but there are some areas for improvement (e.g. more breaks between presentations and more notice given)
- **Collaboration is a core aspect of the panel**, and panellists would have liked more team building and networking opportunities (including a wider tour of the HQ)
- **The Early Careers Panel was considered valuable**, and future customers enjoy learning about how Wessex Water functions as an employer



Helpful for future career



Good teamworking challenge



Enjoyable team presentations



Well organised, informative



Long days



Would have liked a bigger tour



Tasks too repetitive



Needed further feedback on presentations

Terrible

*"It felt as though the main reason that young people hear about the company (sewage issues) was slightly avoided."*

*"It was very engaging. It was nice how we had a task to do, instead of just listening to people speak. I do think the tour was very small, and wasn't I imagined for a tour. I think in the future there should be more walking around the departments and less talking."*

*"It was very informative and helped develop my teamwork skills as well as confidence in presenting."*



Standards for high-quality research:	How these were addressed in this project:
<b>Useful and contextualised</b>	This research is part of Wessex Water's BAU engagement with future customers. 30 6 <sup>th</sup> form students participate in a process that involved in-depth immersion in the workings of a water company and co-creative tasks that relate to either the business operation or long-term planning. The students spend 2 full days in Wessex Water offices and complete a core task that focuses on a real business problem. The activities also include group discussions, team challenges and a survey distributed across a wide range of schools and colleges in the region.
<b>Fit for purpose</b>	This initiative encompasses community engagement with pure research. The methodology enables Wessex Water to learn about the lives and attitudes of future customers and how their views differ from bill payers. Both qualitative and quantitative data is gathered within the approach. Traditional methods of researching young people about water services are problematic as this cohort are very distant from the topic of water services. This co-creative approach is highly engaging for the young people who value the work experience it also offers, and means they become informed and able to give their views on e.g. their priorities for investment.
<b>Neutrally designed</b>	Our team's extensive experience in designing research stimulus and discussion guides ensures our lines of questioning are neutral and not leading. Information is provided about Wessex Water and the regulation of the industry as part of the briefing sessions.
<b>Inclusive</b>	We engage with over 50 schools in the region offering the opportunity for pupils to participate in this initiative. Whilst the process is self-selecting, we ensure that schools and colleges understand that we are looking for applicants from all parts of society and we make it clear that academic performance is not a criteria for selecting applicants. The scheme is oversubscribed; therefore, we are able to choose candidates from a wide geography and a range of schools and colleges.
<b>Continual</b>	The Young People's panel is in its 9 <sup>th</sup> year and is part of Wessex Water's ongoing research and engagement.
<b>Shared in full with others</b>	The research findings are included in this full report for Wessex Water to share as required.
<b>Ethical</b>	Blue Marble is a company partner of the MRS. All of its employees abide by the MRS code of conduct and as such all of our research is in line with their ethical standards.
<b>Independently assured</b>	Wessex Water to advise.



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