

Beyond Single Use: Policy-Ready Research on Reuse Systems

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Introduction

- Single-use packaging contributes significantly to waste and carbon emissions.
- Reusable systems are central to Scotland’s Circular Economy Route Map.
- Two national discrete choice experiments on reuse systems provide robust evidence to accelerate Scotland’s transition from single-use to reusable packaging.

Pathways to Impact

- Enabling policymakers to design effective reuse regulations.
- Giving industry stakeholders the evidence to calibrate deposit-return schemes.
- Equipping NGOs and communicators to engage consumers with tailored messages.
- By informing charge design, deposit levels, infrastructure priorities, and public engagement approaches, the research provides actionable levers for change.

Research Evidence and Findings

Study 1 – Single-use cups: (Scotland n = 1200)

- A choice experiment showed a 25–30p charge halved disposable cup use; equivalent discounts are less efficient, and environmental prompts were not significant.
- People who were more positive about reusables tended to feel that the environmental risks of single-use cups were more serious and that using reusables could make a real difference.
- They also saw fewer downsides to reusable cups and were less drawn to the convenience of single-use.

Study 2 – Returnable packaging: (UK n = 824)

- Price and deposit costs strongly reduce uptake.
- Glass is preferred (especially for cleaner).
- Number of prior uses has a small positive effect for cleaner.
- Two segments emerge: cost-conscious sceptics (older, price sensitive) vs open-minded adopters (younger, more refill-engaged).

Together, these findings specify charge thresholds and deposit structures, identify audiences to target, and indicate messaging levers that emphasise efficacy and remove practical barriers to reuse.

Anticipated Outcomes and Impacts

Outcomes

- **Policy:** Evidence on charges and deposits could enable policymakers to set thresholds and design reuse regulations that are both effective and acceptable.
- **Industry:** Business could use the findings to design viable deposit-return scheme, choosing packaging materials that align with consumer preferences and target early adopters to build momentum.
- **NGOs/Communicators:** Campaigners could draw on the motivation profiles to frame messages around efficacy and barriers, tailoring communication to adoption-ready groups and avoiding overreliance on prompts.

Impacts

- **Environment:** If implemented, charges and deposits at effective levels could reduce the flow of single-use disposables, accelerate the shift to reusable packaging, and cut waste and carbon emissions.
- **Economic:** Evidence-based design of business models and deposit-return systems could encourage investment in reuse infrastructure and create more stable markets for reuse.
- **Social:** Tailored communication strategies could build public confidence in reuse and foster behavioural change across different consumer groups.

Pathways to impact

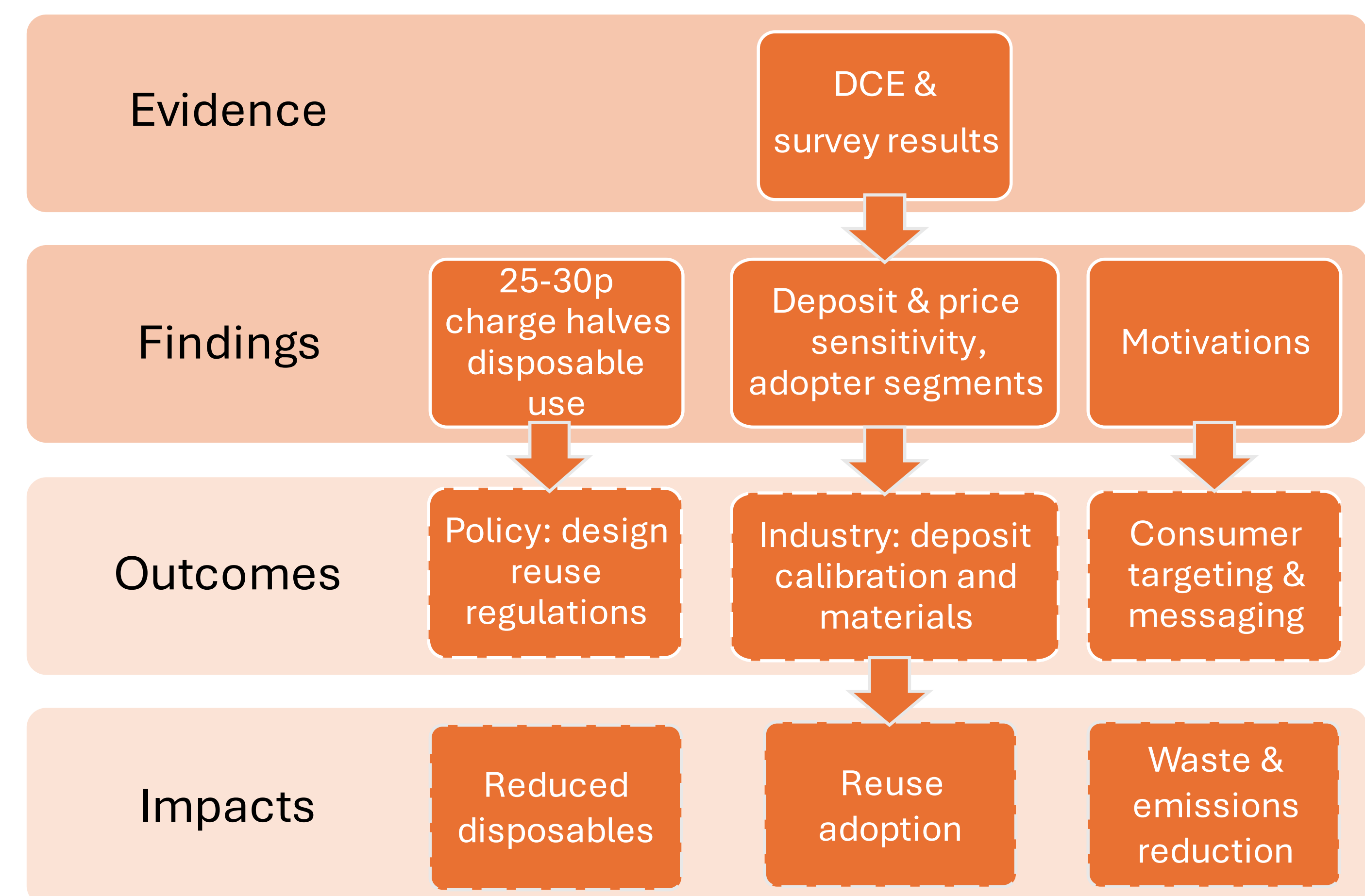


Figure 1 – Pathways to impact from this research.

Conclusions

Robust behavioural evidence now exists to support Scotland’s transition beyond single use. The opportunity lies in translating these insights into policy, business practice, and public engagement. This is the next step to ensuring they deliver systemic environmental and social benefits.

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