

Consumer Rights Study – Summary Report - August 2009

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills commissioned researchers BMRB to conduct a survey into consumers' understanding of their legal rights. The omnibus survey interviewed 2009 adults aged 16+ across Great Britain during August 2009. It was carried out as part of ongoing research by BIS to help develop its 'Know Your Consumer Rights' awareness campaign. This is a summary report; the full results of this survey can be found at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file52820.pdf>

Q1) Thinking now about goods that you've purchased, have you ever done any of the following?

- When asked whether they had ever complained to a store, asked for a refund or asked for an exchange, asking for an exchange (selected by 64% of respondents) was the most common action taken over goods purchased.
- The 65+ age group were significantly, the least likely to have ever asked for either a refund, exchange or complained to a store, with 39% of this group saying they had never done any of these things.

Q2) Over the last three years, how many times have you complained to a store about goods you have bought, asked for a refund and/or asked for an exchange?

- 1-3 times was the most common amount for respondents (who had ever complained) to have reported complaining, exchanging or asking for a refund in the last three years (58%)
- Men, at 10%, were significantly more likely to have made no complaints, returns or exchanges than women (6%) in the last three years
- The 65+ age group, at 15% was the most likely to have made no complaints, returns or exchanges in the last three years
- At 10%, 16-34 year olds were the group most likely to complain/ask for a refund/ask for an exchange between 7 to 10 times this compares significantly with the 3% of 45 year olds and over who did the same
- Over a third (34%) of respondents (who had ever complained) reported complaining, exchanging or asking for a refund in the last three years

Q3) Has trying to save money in the recession made you more or less likely to complain about the goods that you've purchased?

- Overall, the recession has not made a massive impact on whether people are likely to complain – with 69% of respondents reporting that it made no difference
- However, trying to save money during the recession has increased the proportion of women likely to make a complaint about goods (31%) significantly more than men (25%).
- The likelihood of social grades AB complaining is the least changed by the recession with 75% saying it had 'made no difference'.
- Social Grade C1 is the group whose likelihood of making a complaint has most increased since the recession.
- The North East (37%), West Midlands (34%) and Southwest (32%) are the areas where the likelihood of complaining has increased the most in the country (with c.34% of people across these areas saying they were more likely to complain)
- Yorkshire and Humberside only 21% of respondents said they were more likely to complain.
- In East Anglia 18% of people interviewed said that trying to save money in the recession made them more likely to complain about goods purchased than before¹.
- Over a quarter of respondents in the South East (26%) and London (28%) said that trying to save money in the recession made them more likely to complain about goods purchased than before
- In Wales 27% of people interviewed said that trying to save money in the recession made them more likely to complain about goods purchased than before²
- In Scotland 28% of people interviewed said that trying to save money in the recession made them more likely to complain about goods purchased than before

¹ This percentage is based on a small base size (85 respondents) and BMRB standard region divisions

² This percentage is based on a small base size (98 respondents)

Q4) Do you feel you are more likely to be overcharged or misled shopping on the internet or on the high street?

- At the GB level there is close to an equal split between those who felt more likely to be overcharged or misled online (36%) to those who felt this was more likely on the high street (35%).
- Of those that actually offered an opinion there was an even 50-50 split between the internet and the high street
- However, 16-44 year olds were significantly more likely than those aged 55+ to feel overcharged or misled online.
- The age group showing the highest level of mistrust of shopping on the internet were 16-24 year olds, 48% of which felt they would be overcharged/ misled online.
- 45% of 16-34 year olds felt they were more likely than to feel overcharged or misled online
- On the high street the group most likely to feel overcharged/ misled were 35-44 year olds (42%)
- Those aged 65+ were also the age group least likely to feel overcharged or misled on the high street. But were also the group least likely to know either way (52%)

The regional division were fairly consistent, however:

- In the North West 43% of people said they felt they were more likely to be the overcharged/misled on the internet – the highest figures in the country
- 44% of people in London said they felt they were more likely to be overcharged/misled on the high street and at 31% were the group least likely to feel this online
- In contrast, at 31% and 28% respectively, the South West and Yorkshire and Humberside were the areas least likely to feel overcharged/misled on the high street
- Those respondents saying that they were not confident in getting a refund or replacement when returning faulty goods (Q5) were significantly more likely to feel overcharged/misled shopping online (46%) than when shopping in the high street (31%)
- These same respondents were also significantly more likely to feel overcharged/ misled online than those that did feel confident getting a refund (35%)
- In the East Anglia 30% of people said they felt they were more likely to be the overcharged/misled on the internet while 33% said they felt this was more likely on the high street³
- In the North East 35% of people said they felt they were more likely to be the overcharged/misled on the internet while 39% said they felt this was more likely on the high street⁴

³This percentage is based on a small base size (85 respondents) and BMRB standard region divisions

⁴This percentage is based on a small base size (70 respondents)

- In the South East 34% of people said they felt they were more likely to be the overcharged/misled on the internet while 36% said they felt this was more likely on the high street
- In the Scotland 33% of people said they felt they were more likely to be the overcharged/misled on the internet while 34% said they felt this was more likely on the high street

Q5) Have you ever felt that a member of staff working in a shop or for an online store has attempted to dismiss your claims or ignore your consumer rights when you've tried to return goods or get a refund?

- Overall, a third of all respondents (33%) felt that their claims had been dismissed or their consumer rights had been ignored at some point.
- A significantly larger percentage of men (37%) than women (31%) felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund
- 39% of 35-44 year olds said they felt their claims had been dismissed or consumer rights had been ignored - the highest figure for all age groups
- Wales, the West Midlands and the North West were the areas where people were most likely to feel their consumer rights/claims had been ignored or dismissed (41% across all three areas)
- Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents who said they did not feel confident about getting a refund or replacement when returning faulty goods were more likely to say they had had their rights ignored or dismissed, with 56% of them saying this compared to only 31% of respondents who felt confident about making a return
- 40% of people whose weakest reason given when taking back goods for exchange or refund (Q7) was 'Didn't like it/unsuitable' felt their rights had been ignored/dismissed at some point. This was the highest figure for any reason given.
- In comparison, only 22% of people, whose weakest reason given when taking back goods was 'it didn't fit', felt their rights had been ignored/dismissed at some point.
- In East Anglia, 41% of respondents felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund at some point⁵
- In Wales, 46% of respondents felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund at some point⁶
- In Scotland, 31% of respondents felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund at some point
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⁵ This percentage is based on a small base size (59 respondents) and BMRB standard region divisions

⁶ This percentage is based on a small base size (70 respondents)

- In the North East 20% of respondents felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund at some point⁷
- In the West Midlands 42% of respondents felt a member of staff had attempted to dismiss their claims or ignore their consumer rights when they tried to return goods or get a refund at some point

Q6) What is the weakest reason you have given when taking back goods for exchange or refund?

- The three top response rates for this question were: Faulty/broken goods (18%), Didn't like/unsuitable (16%), Doesn't fit (14%).
- 54% of respondents who gave 'Faulty/broken goods' as their reason for returning goods were able to exchange their goods.
- 50% of respondents who used 'it doesn't fit' as their reason for returning goods, were also able to exchange their goods.
- 49% of respondents who used 'didn't like/unsuitable' as their reason for returning goods received a refund.

Q7) And what was the outcome (when the weakest reason was given on taking back goods for exchange or refund)?

- On offering what respondents considered to be their weakest reason for returning goods, receiving a refund (43%) and exchanging goods (39%) were the most common outcomes
- Only in 7% of cases was the outcome something other than receiving a refund, exchange of goods or a credit or discount on future purchases.

⁷This percentage is based on a small base size (51 respondents)