

Policy briefing: UK Repair and Reuse Declaration

October 2023

Throwaway products are fuelling climate change, growing our toxic waste mountain, and they're ripping off the British public: People are stuck in a cycle of throwing away and buying costly new electronics - bad for their wallets and bad for the environment. Right now, the UK is the second highest producer of electronic waste in the world per capita and too often waste prevention is overlooked compared to less efficient waste management.

Everyone should have access to the tools and skills, or services to give their electrical devices like laptops, lamps, and kettles a longer life. Repair and reuse are affordable and easy ways to end frustration with in-built obsolescence. They're central to achieving a truly circular, less wasteful, and resilient economy, help to tackle climate change and achieve our net zero ambition. And they can reduce living costs for UK households and create skilled green jobs.

We are calling for politicians to support repair and reuse by implementing the policies below. A YouGov poll commissioned for the declaration launch showed strong support for all of these measures. Polling results are indicated in brackets below¹.

We ask UK government to:

1. *Make repair more affordable, through tax reductions **(80% support)** and repair vouchers **(79% support)**.*
2. *Expand the UK's right to repair regulations to cover all consumer products, strengthen design standards and remove barriers to repair for everyone **(85% support)**.*
3. *Introduce a repair index to help the public choose more repairable and durable products **(80% support)**.*
4. *Introduce requirements and targets for reuse and repair to be prioritised over recycling and providing investment to make this a reality. This should be a key part of amended extended producer responsibility rules **(83% support)**.*
5. *Support a new generation of repairers through repair training, accreditation and apprenticeships **(85% support)**.*

¹ The poll was commissioned by The Restart Project. All figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,051 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12th - 13th October 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

How UK government can support repair and reuse

1. Making repair more affordable *(Responsible: HM Treasury/ DEFRA)*

What we're asking for: **Make repair more affordable, through tax reductions and repair vouchers.**

The problem: Cost is one of the main things stopping the public from seeking repair when something breaks. In the recent Restart Project commissioned poll, the top reason for those that didn't repair their most recent broken electrical product was that "repair is too expensive". Research by the French Environment Agency (ADEME) shows that people are unlikely to choose repair of a product if the price of a repair is more than 30% of the price of the same product new. Often this is perceived cost, comparing unfavourably to the price of new, low quality products.

The solutions:

- **Repair vouchers:** Austria set up a national repair voucher scheme in 2022, which effectively subsidised the cost of professional repairs by allowing families to obtain a rebate of 50% of the price of a repair, up to €200 per year. This was built on a number of regional trials. The Upper Austrian trial, found that 40% of the beneficiaries wouldn't have chosen repair without the voucher scheme.

While the Austrian model currently relies on Next Generation EU funding, France has since initiated an innovative repair voucher scheme in 2023, funded by Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) income. This route to financing the scheme could be applicable to the UK, as it effectively uses part of the existing contributions from manufacturers to extend the lifetime of products and prevent products from prematurely entering the e-waste stream.

The government department responsible for EPR is DEFRA. A consultation on the future of EPR for electronics and electricals is overdue and expected imminently.

- **Cutting VAT on repairs.** Parliament's 2021 Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on electronic waste asked the UK government to reduce VAT on the repair of electrical and electronic products. Back then the Government rejected the proposal.

A recent [study by Green Alliance](#) showed 54% of people surveyed in the UK support green VAT measures like this. Only 12% oppose. And it could contribute to creating 34,000 jobs in the repair economy.

A number of businesses, from manufacturers (AMDEA) to spare parts providers (Replace Base) are currently calling for removing VAT, both on spare parts and on repair services.

The Government department responsible for reducing VAT is HM Treasury

2. Designing, manufacturing and supporting products to be durable and repairable *(Responsible: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero - DESNZ and DEFRA)*

What we're asking for: **Expand the UK's right to repair regulations to cover all consumer products, strengthen design standards and remove barriers to repair for everyone.**

The problem: It has become harder and harder for people to repair their things. Products are rarely designed to be repaired, getting hold of the repair information and spare parts is hard, and security support for connected products ends too soon, making products prematurely obsolete or insecure.

The solution: The UK has existing ecodesign legislation for many energy related products. These have mainly focused on energy in use, but the latest round of standards that included white goods and TVs, started to look at resource efficiency and repair for a limited set of products. They mandate that manufacturers must make service manuals and some spare parts for these products available to professional repairers for 7 to 10 years after retiring a product from the market. Now it's time to expand this "right to repair" legislation so that it's fit for purpose in our rapidly changing consumer goods economy. This means:

- **Expand and strengthen Ecodesign regulation to cover all electronic and consumer products** with a right to repair rule, ensuring that all new consumer electricals must be designed for easy reparability before they can be introduced to the market.
- **Ensure that all people have access to service manuals**, so consumers, community repair groups and independent repairers have the information they need to fix these products. And **ensure all people can access spare parts for at least 10 years** after a product is removed from the market.
- **Ensure that software and security updates are provided for at least 5 years after a product comes off the market.**

For products connected to the internet, like phones, laptops and, increasingly other products like smart fridges and other appliances, ongoing security updates are needed to protect households from hacking risks. Ongoing software support is needed to keep the products functioning as they should.

Too often, this software and security support ends within a few years, far before the useful lifetime of the product ends. This means too many products become obsolete too early, which increases electronic waste - or puts consumers at risk.

The Product Security and Telecommunications infrastructure Act introduced in April 2023 mandates that from 29 April 2024 manufacturers must be transparent about how long they will support products with security updates. However the act lacks any requirements for minimum support periods.

After a recent successful campaign in the USA, Google extended its support for Chromebooks, widely used in schools, to 10 years, for all models released since 2021. Doubling the life of Chromebooks could cut carbon pollution equivalent to taking 900,000 cars off the road for a year, according to US PIRG. It could also result in \$1.8 billion in savings for schools in the US. It shows that

it is possible for software companies to provide support for an extended period when mandated to.

The EU has recently expanded its ecodesign regulations to cover smartphones and tablets. This mandates that from June 2025 manufacturers will have to make software and security updates available for new models for at least 5 years after removing a product from the market, as well as making spare parts and repair information available for at least 7 years.

3. Supporting consumers to choose repairable products

(Responsible: DEFRA)

What we're asking for: *Introduce a repair index to help the public choose more repairable and durable products.*

The problem: UK consumers aren't able to easily find out how repairable products are when purchasing new items. This means they buy products that they have to replace sooner than they'd like, and there's little incentive for manufacturers to make products repairable.

The solution: Introduce a repair index at the point of sale of new electrical products. This would be similar to the existing eco rating we have for energy use on appliances now, but based on how easy it is to repair each product. **DEFRA has powers to introduce this through the Environment Act.**

A repair index has been in place in France since 2021. For this, manufacturers self-assess the repairability of their products based on agreed criteria. This is then displayed as a single score from 0-10, displayed prominently alongside the price.

Analysis of the french repair index after the first year showed that:

- 55% of people were aware of the index
- 76% of those aware, said it was useful for their purchase
- Consumers tended to prefer products with a higher repairability score.

Introducing a similar index in the UK will not place an unnecessary administrative burden on manufacturers, as most manufacturers are already conducting an analysis of the repairability of their products for the French scheme.

4. Saving reusable products from being wasted

(Responsible: DEFRA)

What we're asking for: *Introduce requirements and targets for reuse and repair to be prioritised over recycling, and provide investment to make this a reality. This should be a key part of amended Extended Producer Responsibility rules.*

The problem: Too many products which could be given a second life, are being shredded for recycling, resulting in a huge loss of energy and resources.

In a [recent study](#) of small appliances taken to a Household Reuse and Recycling Centre, The Restart Project found that almost half of the electrical products sent for recycling during the study could have remained in use if reuse and repair processes had been in place:

- 36% of all small electricals headed for recycling were still working.
- An additional 10% of items assessed only needed simple, low cost repairs.
- It was estimated that across the UK this could mean that over 30,000 usable electrical products, with a potential resale value of up to £5,000 are being recycled every week.

These figures on potential reuse are consistent with previous research, e.g. a [2017 report](#) estimated that over 45% of vacuum cleaners and 40% of laptops in household WEEE (waste electricals) were either fit for reuse, or required only minor repairs to be reused.

Reuse and repair are widely acknowledged as more efficient than recycling. But there are no binding requirements or incentives for manufacturers, or the public sector and their service providers in the resources and waste management industry, to prioritise reuse. In fact, although recycling targets and the current Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) requirements include reuse, they inadvertently dissuade manufacturers and local authorities from investing in redistributing reusable items. With a far more established value chain, combined with the challenge of meeting targets the emphasis has been on recycling, and in the absence of specific reuse targets, there are few real incentives for local authorities to invest in redistributing usable products.

The solution: Reuse shops in waste facilities across the country help to bring reusable products back into circulation, and initiatives like the Manchester Renew Hub run by SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK show that reuse at scale is possible.

An overhaul of the current EPR rules is needed to drive the establishment of local and national infrastructure to keep products in use for longer, saving people money and using our resources more efficiently. This should include:

- A binding requirement to increase reuse in collaboration with local reuse and repair initiatives. This needs to be a separate target, prioritised over recycling.
- These targets should be complemented with targets for overall waste reduction.
- EPR could be used to drive improvements in product design and could help fund initiatives to support reuse and repair such as repair vouchers (see section 1).

5. Building a workforce for a revitalised repair and reuse economy

(Responsible: Department for Education, input from Department for Business and Trade)

What we're asking for: Support a new generation of repairers through repair training, accreditation and apprenticeships.

The problem: The Chartered Institution for Wastes Management estimates that for the transition to a circular economy, [20,000 repair and reuse jobs will be needed by 2030](#), with 80,000+ needed by 2040. Green Alliance estimates that an effective and expanded circular economy could help [create over 450,000 jobs](#) by 2035.

Yet even as public demand for repair and preloved products, and as the need for competent and safe repair of our appliances increases, we are losing skilled repairers.

Repair cafes are frequently oversubscribed, with public demand for repair far outstripping fixing capacity at the volunteer-run events. The most common items taken to UK repair cafes are vacuum cleaners and lamps, with two thirds (67%) of lamps and over half (53%) of vacuums successfully fixed according to the extensive [Open Repair Alliance dataset](#). Yet repair options are not readily available. Of more than 300 reliable repair shops on The Restart Project's directory, Londonrepairs.org, only 2 will fix lamps, and 9 will fix vacuums.

Even where jobs are guaranteed by manufacturers offering repair services, [recruitment of new repairers is challenging](#). Service engineers are getting older, and as the workforce retires, there will soon be a shortage of repair capacity.

This is having a knock on effect on training availability, with courses for repair technicians dwindling due to reduced demand. There are currently no accreditation options available for electrical repair training. So there are few options, and fewer incentives, for those that want to learn repair skills.

Upstream, there is significant demand for designers who can create repairable products. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) lists circular product designers as one of the most important 'frontline green jobs' needed to grow a circular green economy. Currently few industrial design courses teach learners how to design for repair, and there is a significant need to upskill current designers.

The solution: Alongside the measures needed to build demand and infrastructure for a strong repair and reuse economy outlined above, we need investment in repair skills to drive the economy. This means:

- Introduce an accreditation scheme for repair professionals.
- Fund specific skills interventions like Skills Bootcamps on repair and green design.
- Expedite relevant apprenticeships that are in progress, like the IFATE [Digital Device Repair Technician Apprenticeship](#), stimulate apprenticeships for other electrical appliances and build repair into existing electrician and mechanical engineering apprenticeships.

What else can MPs do after signing the declaration?

Once MPs have signed the declaration (or if they can't because of a position they hold), **they can continue to champion repair and reuse by:**

1. **Writing to the Secretaries of State for the four departments** that are responsible for these policy areas: DEFRA, DESNZ, Treasury, DfE, to highlight that their constituents care about the issue.
2. **Asking an oral question in the next Parliamentary Questions** session for the responsible departments relating to the asks. These could include:
 - **DEFRA:** We're all familiar with the mantra "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle", and it's well acknowledged that reducing (including repair) and reusing are the more efficient ways of cutting resource waste, yet the UK's waste management regulations and resources are skewed heavily towards recycling, the least efficient option. Schemes to increase reuse and repair are working in other countries and include measures such as: reuse targets, repair vouchers to reduce the cost of repair - funded by better use of EPR, and a repair index to allow consumers to make informed decisions. What are the DEFRA's plans to encourage more resource efficient practices like reuse and repair?
 - **DESNZ:** Our ecodesign regulations are being overtaken by ambitious legislation in the USA and EU. What are the department's plans to extend our Right to Repair rules to all electrical products, so that the UK public isn't being left behind?
 - **Treasury:** Repair is essential for households to cut unnecessary spend on new products, is a core part of a growing refurbishment and resale economy and could support levelling up by creating 450,000 jobs across the UK. But repair costs too much. Will the treasury consider removing VAT on spare parts and labour to help our repair and reuse economies to thrive?
 - **DfE:** Repair skills are being lost, with well known employers finding it harder and harder to recruit repair technicians and high street repair shops slowly shutting down as repairers retire. What is the DfE doing to build the next generation of repairers?