



Perceptions of the Blue Flag Award: Welsh Beaches and Tourism

Survey Report 2022-23



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Table of Contents

Summary	2
The Blue Flag Award	5
Other Coast Awards	7
Public Perceptions of the Blue Flag Award	8
Public Survey Results.....	8
Business Perceptions of the Blue Flag Award.....	19
Business Survey Results	19
Conclusions	22
References	23
Appendix 1 – Award Winning Beaches in Wales 2022	24
Appendix 2 – Welsh Beaches and Tourism Survey Questions (Public).....	25
Appendix 3 – Blue Flag Business Survey Questions	28
Appendix 4 – Keep Wales Tidy official statement for counties with Blue Flag losses for 2022 bathing season	30

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Summary

Wales is renowned for its incredible coastline and beaches which are popular with both residents and visitors. It provides a diverse range of benefits to people and wildlife, and it supports the Welsh economy by acting as a haven to exercise, relax or spend time with family and friends. Over 10% of people in Wales are employed in the tourism sector¹ which demonstrates the importance of having access to a clean, diverse coastline that is well-managed to attract visitors from around the world.

The Blue Flag Award is an international award certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) which recognises that a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator meets the high standard required. In Wales, the award is operated through Keep Wales Tidy. It is awarded based on a range of criteria, representing 'environmental excellence' which are detailed later in this report. Keep Wales Tidy also runs other international awards including the Eco-Schools programme and the Green Key Award.

This report builds on similar research from 2017-2018. It reinforces awareness of the Blue Flag award in Wales and the importance of the award to both those who visit the beach and the local businesses that are located near them. As the longest standing award, the Blue Flag is the most recognised award that Keep Wales Tidy currently coordinates.

The public survey indicated that awareness of the Blue Flag Award in Wales is still very high, with more than 90% of people having heard of the award. Many participants recognise it as an international award for water quality and beach cleanliness, though less realise the extended criteria. More than 50% of people state that if a beach no longer had the Blue Flag award, it would or could possibly affect their decision to visit that beach, demonstrating an important link between the high recognition of the award and the impact on perceptions of both locals and visitors. Blue Flag awareness was also high amongst businesses, with almost 80% of business respondents having heard of the award. Significantly, over 75% of business respondents believe the Blue Flag award attracts visitors to their area and 63.8% think that the award brings additional benefits to their business. This demonstrates how important the Blue Flag Award is for tourism and visitor spend.

To conclude, the awareness of the Blue Flag Award is high from both the public and coastal businesses. The Blue Flag could impact the decision to visit a certain beach and therefore, the presence of the award affects the surrounding businesses and communities. This shows just how important it is for local authorities, landowners and beach managing committees to strive to achieve a Blue Flag standard where possible not just for the environmental excellence it represents, but the wider social and economic impacts it has on local communities. Going forward, it will be important to maintain high quality environmental education and promotion of environmental awards to inspire change amongst communities and conserve the diversity and beauty of our natural spaces in Wales.



Introduction

The Blue Flag programme is owned by the non-governmental, non-profit organisation [Foundation for Environmental Education](#) (FEE). It was implemented in Europe from 1987 and eventually, the award became international in 2001. The programme is currently operating in 50 countries and the Blue Flag is one of the most recognized voluntary awards in the world. 2022 marked the 35th year of the Blue Flag Award in Wales and here, the national operator for the award is Keep Wales Tidy. The Blue Flag Award celebrates beaches, marinas and tourism boats that display and maintain a series of educational, environmental, accessibility and safety criteria. In 2022, there were 22 Blue Flag beaches and three Blue Flag marinas in Wales (Appendix 1). Despite the longevity and increasing global recognition of the programme, there has not been a great deal of research into demonstrated social and economic impacts of the award. There is little doubt that it has played a significant role in increasing environmental quality and beach standards across the world.

The public survey, on Welsh beaches, tourism and perceptions of the Blue Flag Award (Appendix 2), was published on social media. The aim of the survey was to learn about public awareness and understanding of the Blue Flag Award and whether the award had an influence on visitor choices. A similar, smaller survey (Appendix 3) was conducted face-to-face with businesses who operate on or near a Blue Flag beach to investigate their knowledge of the award and whether it had any impact or added any economic value to the business. Building on the previous research, it was important to undertake the business surveys face to face to gather a good level of responses.

The entirety of the Welsh coastline provides a diverse range of benefits to people, wildlife and industry. The sustainable management of our seas and coastal areas is critical to ensuring that these areas continue to thrive, and although this report focuses on the perceptions of people and land-based businesses, the wider benefits of a clean, biodiverse and well managed coastline should not be underestimated.

Wales has 1,680 miles of coastline and Welsh territorial seas cover approximately 32,000km², which makes our marine area approximately 35% larger than our territorial landmass. There are 139 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) covering 69% of our inshore waters¹ and in 2019, the [Welsh National Marine Plan](#) was established. The plan envisions healthy and resilient seas, sustainable management of natural resources and a thriving economy, with an understanding of and access to the marine environment³. 2022 marked the 10th anniversary of the [Wales Coast Path](#), the first of its kind in the world, that stretches 870 miles and provides endless access around the entire coastline. The coastal trail is just one asset that boosts the Welsh economy, with tourism in Wales being worth over £6 billion, and half of all visitors to Wales attracted to the coast and seaside towns⁴.

A recent Visit Wales survey⁵ found that visitors in Wales were most satisfied with the 'quality of the natural environment' (83% very satisfied), followed by 'feeling of safety' (80%) and 'cleanliness of beaches' (77%) demonstrating the importance of local environment and beach quality for tourism in the Wales. Research also shows that people seek experiences to reconnect to heritage, nature and their community and the launch of the Year of Trails 2023 by Visit Wales encourages residents and visitors to support and explore different corners of the country during challenging times.

Unsurprisingly, coastal communities tend to enjoy better overall health and life satisfaction, and recent research shows that pro-environmental behaviours increase when there is high coastal proximity or recreational visits⁶. This connection and appreciation for the natural world is likely to ignite a greater belief in climate change and demand regulation of carbon emissions, as there is increased exposure to environmental changes⁷ such as extreme weather events, sea level rise and pollution at the coast. Our coastal communities in Wales not only make up the majority of our population, but they are also the most susceptible to climate change. Therefore, it is important that residents and visitors in Wales have access to well-maintained blue space, with the education and ability to support sustainable growth and nature recovery. The enhancement of ocean literacy across society will be crucial to achieving the behaviour change needed to address the challenges our seas and coasts face⁸, with collaborative and community efforts to protect our environment now and for the future.





The Blue Flag Award

The Blue Flag programme challenges local authorities and beach operators to achieve high standards in water quality, environmental education, environmental management and safety. It strives to promote sustainable development and works to bring tourism and environmental sectors together on local, regional and national levels⁹.

The Blue Flag international criteria for beaches encompasses a minimum of 33 criterion that are categorised as either imperative or guideline. Most of the beach criteria are imperative but the national operator can choose to have stricter criteria, subject to communication with and approval by the national and international jury. Local authorities or beach operators who wish to meet the standard and receive the award must apply each year, but FEE and the national operator have the right to temporarily or permanently withdraw or refuse the award if obligations are not met.

A beach is eligible for the Blue Flag Award if:

- The beach is a legally designated bathing area.
- The beach has the necessary facilities and services to comply with the criteria.
- The beach must be accessible to all regardless of age, gender, religion or political view.

Criteria for a Blue Flag beach include (but are not limited to):

Water Quality

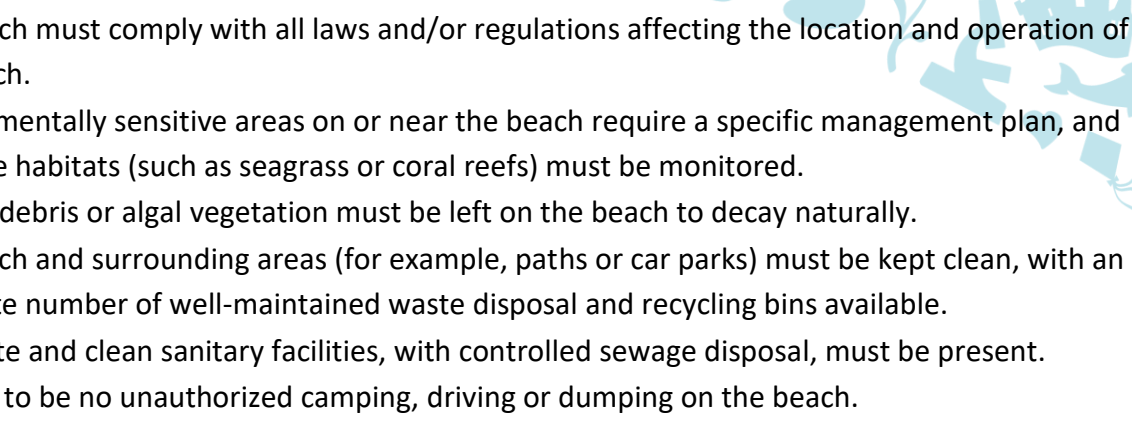
- Achieving 'Excellent' bathing water quality, based on the most appropriate national or international standards or legislation.
- No sewage or industrial related discharges may affect the beach area.
- Visibly clean water that is clear of pollutants or floatables such as oil or litter.
- Compliance with water quality sampling and frequency requirements, followed by specific standards and requirements for sample analysis.

Environmental Education

- Information about bathing water quality, the Blue Flag programme and other FEE eco-awards must be displayed.
- Information about local coastal eco-systems, cultural sites or sensitive areas must be displayed.
- A minimum of five environmental education activities must be offered and promoted at each beach.
- A map of the beach showing key facilities and services must be displayed.
- The beach code of conduct, including the laws governing beach use, must be displayed.

Environmental Management

- A beach management committee must be established to institute and monitor environmental management systems.

- 
- The beach must comply with all laws and/or regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach.
 - Environmentally sensitive areas on or near the beach require a specific management plan, and sensitive habitats (such as seagrass or coral reefs) must be monitored.
 - Natural debris or algal vegetation must be left on the beach to decay naturally.
 - The beach and surrounding areas (for example, paths or car parks) must be kept clean, with an adequate number of well-maintained waste disposal and recycling bins available.
 - Adequate and clean sanitary facilities, with controlled sewage disposal, must be present.
 - There is to be no unauthorized camping, driving or dumping on the beach.
 - Dog and other domestic animal access to the beach must be strictly managed.
 - All buildings and beach equipment must be properly maintained.
 - Sustainable transportation must be promoted at the beach.

Safety and Services

- Public safety control measures must be implemented as appropriate. An adequate number of lifeguards and/or lifesaving equipment must be available according to the site assessment.
- First aid equipment must be available at the beach.
- Emergency plans must be in place to cope with pollution risks.
- Management of different users and uses of the beach must be in place to prevent accidents and conflict.
- There must be safe access to the beach and there must be safety measures in place to protect users.
- A supply of potable drinking water must be available on the beach.
- In each municipality, there must be at least one Blue Flag beach with access and toilet facilities provided for disabled persons.

The Blue Flag Award is also available to marinas and sustainable tourism boats that meet similar criteria. The full criteria list for each Blue Flag Award can be found [here](#).

Other Coast Awards



**Gwobr
Arfordir
Glas** | **Green
Coast
Award**

**Seaside
Award
Gwobr
Glan Môr**



The **Green Coast Award** recognises excellent water quality and the unspoiled environment of our 'hidden gems' in Wales. Unlike a Blue Flag Award beach, Green Coast sites do not have the infrastructure and intensive management generally associated with more traditional seaside resorts. Importantly, this award encourages people to 'adopt' areas of the coast and contribute towards the sustainability of the area, while promoting volunteering. Currently, Wales has 13 Green Coast Award beaches.

The **Seaside Award** operates in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and is awarded to coastal destinations that are clean and safe, with exceptional facilities. Currently, there are 23 Seaside Award beaches in Wales.

A map of the beaches with Blue Flag, Green Coast and Seaside awards in Wales can be found [here](#).



Public Perceptions of the Blue Flag Award

The public survey was carried out online in January 2023 and we gathered a total number of 401 responses. This survey follows a previous survey conducted by Keep Wales Tidy in 2017, which allows some comparison on how perceptions of the Blue Flag Award have changed in recent years.

Public Survey Results

- Over 90% of people have heard of the Blue Flag Award.
- Over half of respondents knew whether their favourite beach had the Blue Flag Award.
- 9 out of 10 of people identified that the Blue Flag Award represented water cleanliness.
- 54% of people stated that a loss of a Blue Flag Award could affect their decision to visit a beach.
- 17% of visitors chose their favourite beach solely based on the Blue Flag Award.
- 83% of people find sustainability important when choosing holiday providers or accommodation.

Who Responded to the Survey?

The public survey was completed by 401 people, representing 20 out of the 22 local authorities across Wales (Figure 1). The highest representation was from Neath Port Talbot (24.2%), Swansea (14.5%) and Cardiff (8.5%). There was no to low representation from Blaenau Gwent, Wrexham,

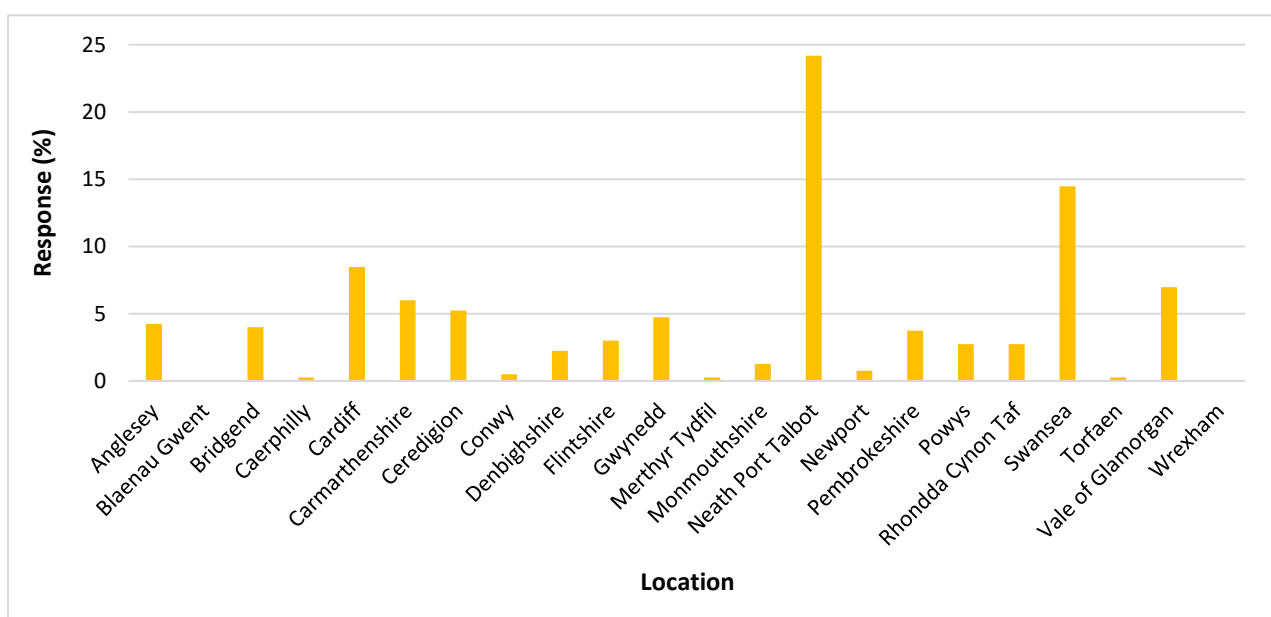


Figure 1 The percentage of public survey respondents in each local authority in Wales.

Caerphilly and Torfaen. 4% of responses came from outside Wales, including areas of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and further afield.

People of all ages were represented in the survey and the most common age ranges were 45-54 and 55-64 (representing 22% each). 1.3% of respondents were under the age of 18 whilst 4.2% were 18-24. 20.5% of respondents were 25-34, and 14.5% were 35-44. Finally, 15.6% of respondents were over the age of 65. Female and male respondents accounted for 72% and 25.7% of the survey respectively, while 0.5% answered 'other' and 1.8% opted not to say.

Overall, these demographics show that the public survey was responded to by a diverse range of people of all locations, ages and genders from Wales and beyond.

Why do people visit beaches in Wales?

We asked respondents to consider their favourite beach in Wales. A range of beach names in Wales were given as favourites (Figure 2). The diversity of beaches shows how popular beaches are for residents, but also how important beaches are for Welsh tourism. Beaches from all coastal areas of North, West and South Wales were given as favourites, noting that residents and visitors may have different names for the same beach (for example Port Talbot and Aberavon).



Figure 2 Favourite beaches from public survey responses. Larger font equates to higher mentions.

We asked respondents to consider their favourite beach and asked them to indicate what the usual nature of their visit was. 46% of people stated that they live close to the beach, which is not surprising given the demographics of Wales and our populous coastal areas. 35% of people stated that they would go on a day trip and 17.9% stated that they would go on holiday to the area (Figure 3). It is recognised that people who took part in the survey are likely to enjoy beaches in general, however 1.1% of respondents stated that they do not visit the beach. This shows how popular

Welsh beaches are with the public, but people appear to favour beaches that they can travel back and forth to in a single day.

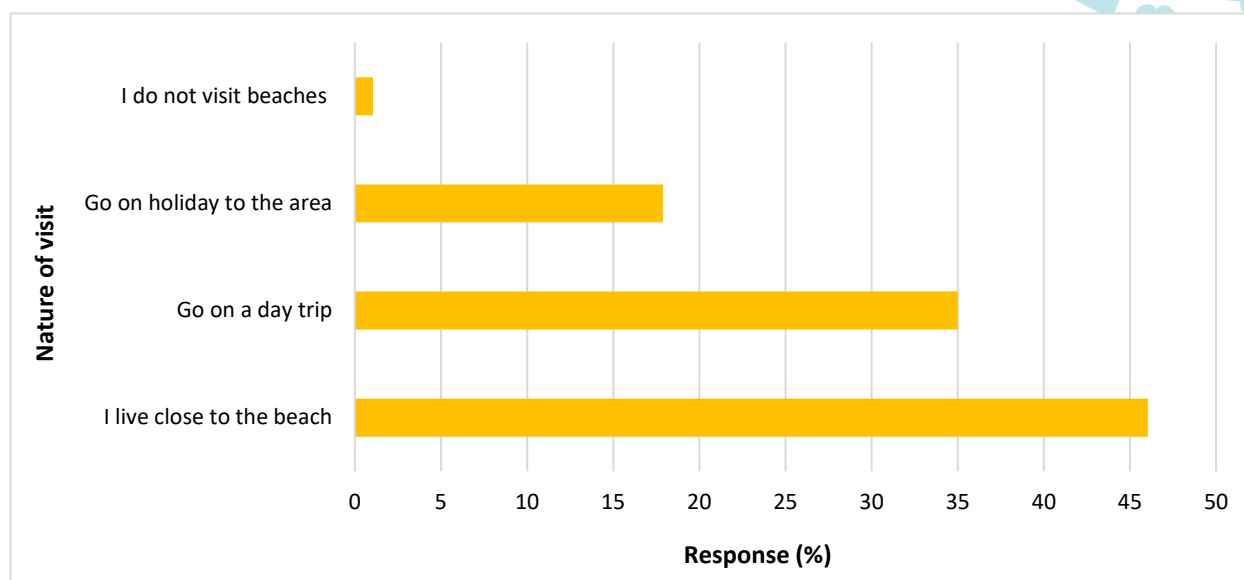


Figure 3 The nature of beach visits in Wales.

Again, we asked respondents to consider their favourite beach and to tell us what they liked about that beach in particular (Figure 4). We offered an expanded series of categories (Appendix 2) for this question but also allowed 'other' to be selected.

The most common reason for favouring a specific beach was the views (81%). In 2017, this category was not an option and beach cleanliness was the most popular answer). However, beach cleanliness has grown in importance since then, with 75.9% of people stating that they like the cleanliness of their favourite beach (~5% more than 2017). Peacefulness, easy parking and access to walking routes were all popular responses, as well as beach safety.

Easy parking highlights the importance of beaches being easily accessible by car, although we argue that accessibility by and frequency of public transport is equally important. Access to walking routes suggests that many people enjoy walking by the coast during their visits. The popularity of scenery and peacefulness shows the significance of blue space and well-being, and the increase since 2017 could be attributed to the reconnection to nature post pandemic.

Less popular responses included that the beach was good for water sports (15.2%) and the presence of lifeguards (15.3%). However, we note that lifeguard presence may link to other categories such as safe for swimming (selected by 42.1% of respondents) and beach safety (56.8%). Almost a third (31.1%) of people stated that they liked the wildlife at their favourite beach, while 37.8% mentioned that the beach was good for dog-walking. 24.1% of people thought their favourite beach had a convenient location for other areas 41.3% thought it was a good space for children.

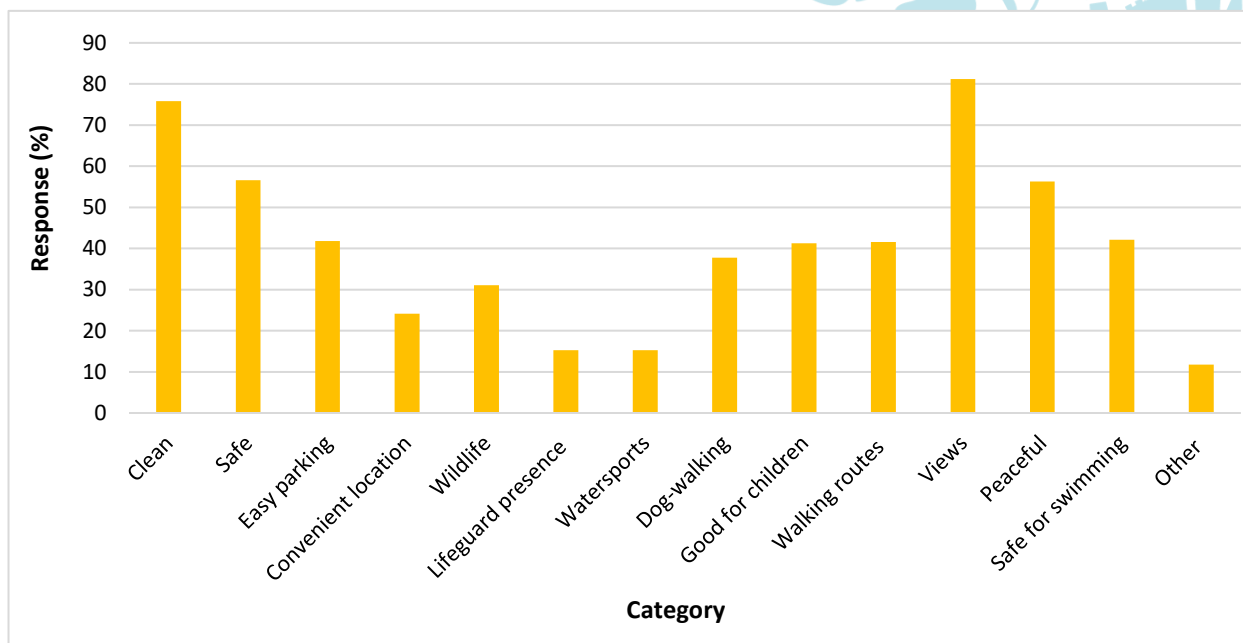


Figure 4 Responses given by people for liking their favourite beach.

11.8% of respondents chose 'Other' and analysis of these answers can be further categorised:

- 30% mentioned the beach being secluded, peaceful or remote.
- 20% discussed facilities such as toilets, cafes or electric vehicle charging points.
- 14% mentioned physical features on the beach such as the geology or sandy beach.
- 11% stated personal reasons for such as the beach was near, familiar or sentimental.
- 9% discussed their favourite beach as being good for swimming or water sports.
- Other responses included that the beach was good for horse-riding, or that it is close to other beaches.

Like the previous survey, many 'other' responses suggest a very personal connection between the public and the beach, and that people are proud of the environment at their favourite beach.

“The wild and green feeling at the beach.”

“Clean, as we pick up rubbish on our twice daily dog walks.”

“Early morning surfs with grandchildren, star gazing and freedom for kids to roam.”

“I love seeing the roosting starlings under the pier.”

Awareness of the Blue Flag Award

This set of questions aimed to find out the awareness of the Blue Flag award itself. The results show that most people are aware of the award, what it stands for and that it operates internationally.

91% of respondents had heard of the award, and 81.2% also know what the award is (Figure 5). Only 7.4% of participants had not heard of it, whilst 1.9% stated that they did not know. Compared to 2017, it appears that Blue Flag awareness has slightly decreased (96.3%, ~5% drop). However, the survey showed that the Blue Flag was the most well-known award compared to other environmental awards like Green Flag for Parks, Eco-Schools and Green Key.

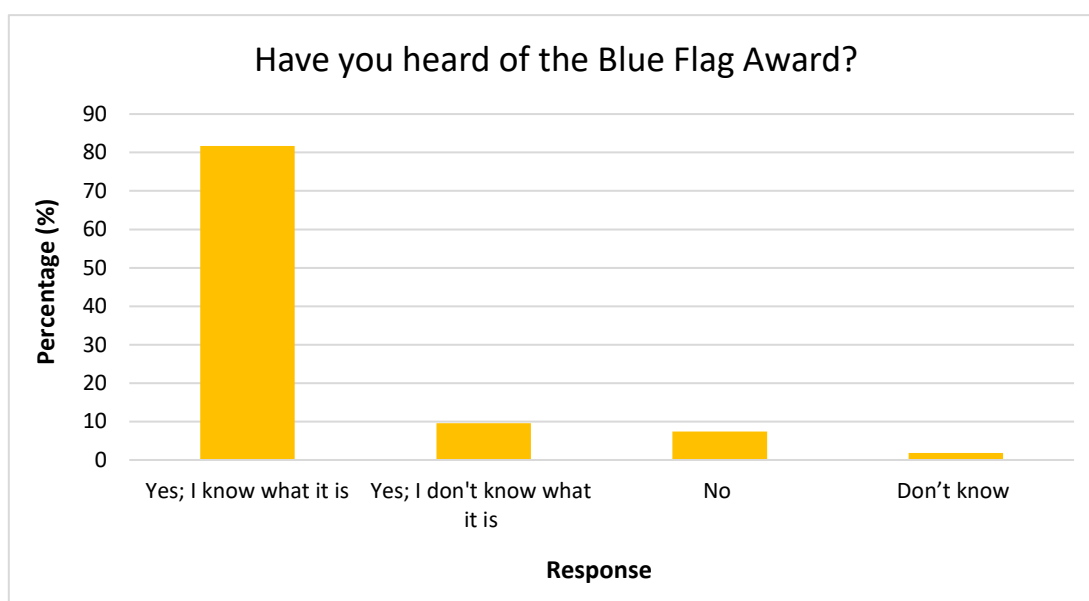


Figure 5 The percentage of respondents who have heard and not heard of the Blue Flag Award.

We also asked respondents whether they thought that the Blue Flag was a national or international award (Figure 6). 29.9% of respondents recognised that the Blue Flag award is an international award, although many people also thought it was either just in the UK or in Europe.

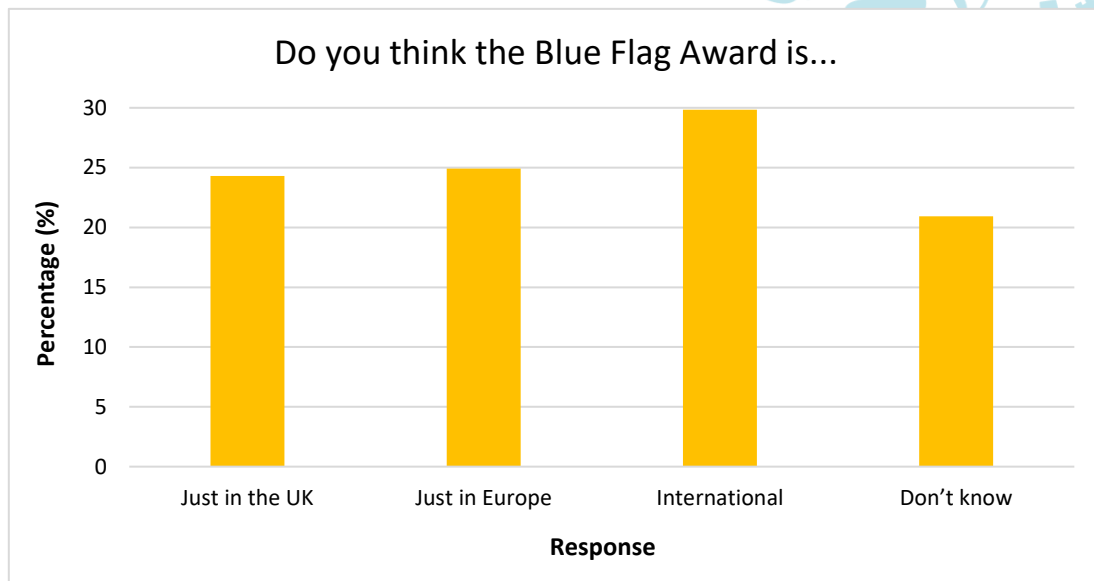


Figure 6 The percentage of respondents who think the Blue Flag is in the UK, Europe and International.

Participants were asked if they knew whether their favourite beach in Wales has been awarded a Blue Flag. Just over half of all respondents knew whether their favourite beach has a Blue Flag Award (Figure 7). 29.5% of participants stated that they knew their favourite beach had the Blue Flag Award and 20.9% of people stated that their beach did not.

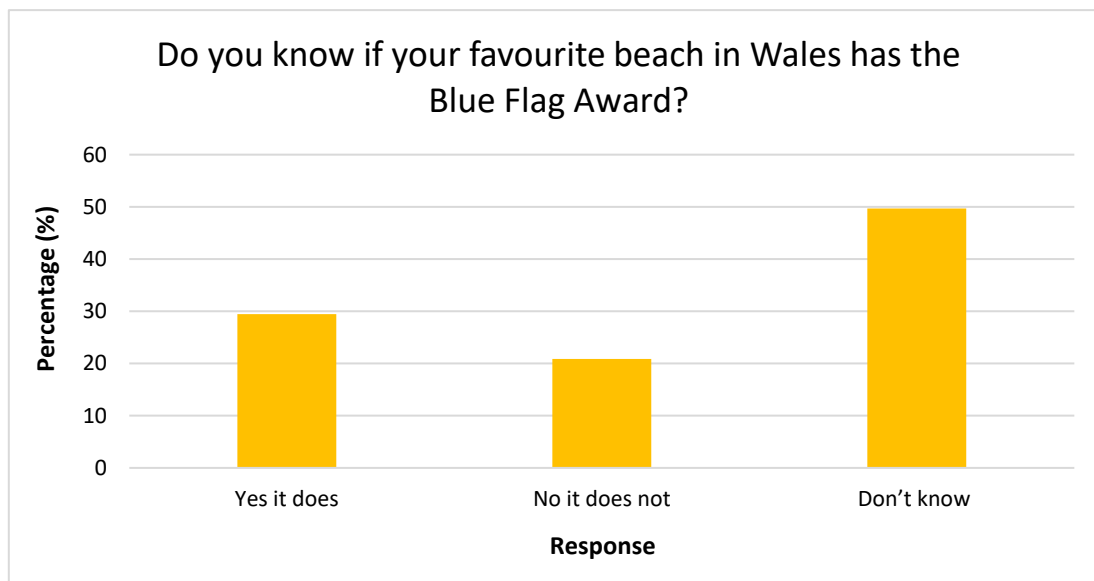


Figure 7 The percentage of respondents who know if their favourite beach has a Blue Flag Award.

Understanding of the Blue Flag Award

Participants were asked their opinion on what the Blue Flag Award represents. The respondents were given categories along with 'other please specify' (see below). The category selection was formed based on the responses and/or themes from the 2017 survey.

- Water quality*
- Beach cleanliness*

*Beach cleanliness and water quality were included under the same category in 2017.

- Environmental education present on the beach
- Public safety (e.g. lifeguards)
- Accessibility
- Facilities (e.g. public toilets, cafes)
- Wildlife
- Other

In 2017, most respondents (90.1%) thought that the Blue Flag Award stood for clean and safe beaches and/or water and this year was no different. Water quality was chosen by 91.4% of respondents and beach cleanliness chosen by 86.6% (Figure 8). This shows that the public strongly associate the Blue Flag award with clean beaches and water.

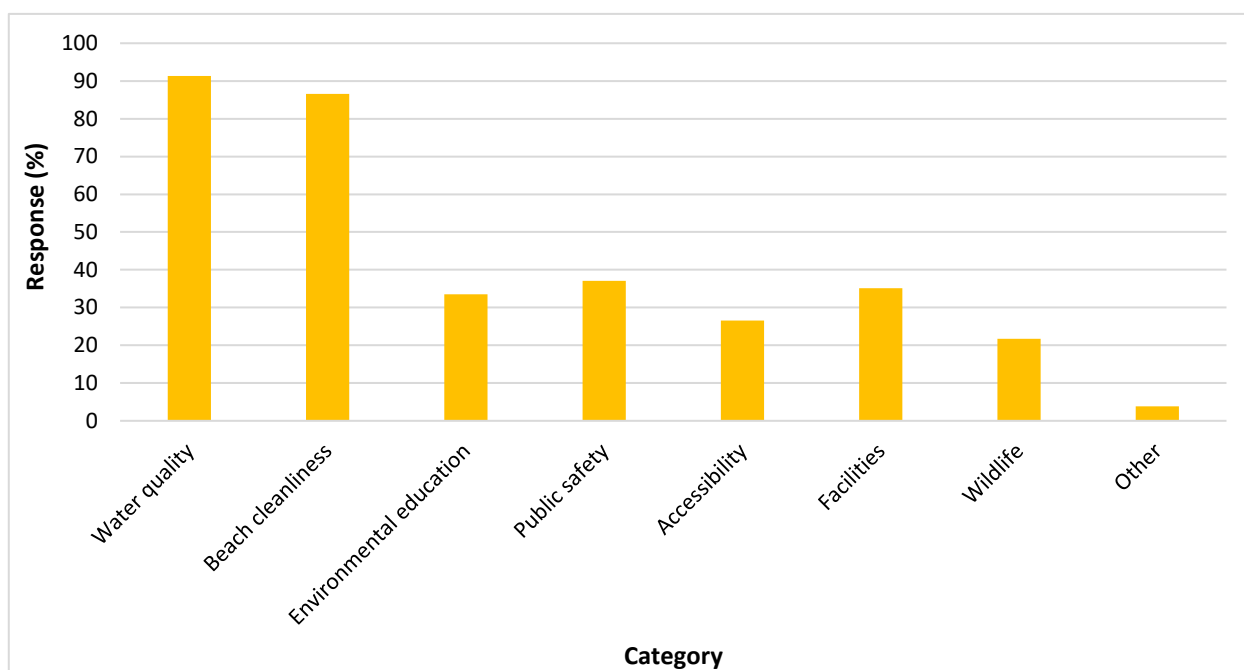


Figure 8 Respondents opinions on what the Blue Flag award represents.

The results reflect that the public have a strong awareness of a few Blue Flag criteria but does not highlight the full scale and breadth of criteria needed to achieve a Blue Flag standard. There is more education and outreach required by local authorities, beach managers and other organisations to highlight the extent of the award.



11 respondents selected 'other' and out of these responses:

- 2 people mentioned lifeguards and/or facilities.
- 2 people mentioned beach and water quality.
- 3 responses were critical of the Blue Flag increasing tourism.

The other responses discussed food and drink, environment quality and dog safety.

Participants were also asked to choose which of the criteria is most important to them. Again, water quality and beach cleanliness were top, with water quality receiving 42.6% and beach cleanliness receiving 43.9% of the answers. Public safety received 3.6% of answers, Accessibility received 1.3%, Facilities received 3.7% and Wildlife received 4.6%. One person voted for environmental education being present on the beach as being the most important criteria.

Impact of the Blue Flag Award

We asked respondents whether the Blue Flag Award had an impact on their choice to go to their favourite beach. 17.2% of respondents stated yes, whilst 10.1% stated that they did not know. Although 72.7% of respondents indicated that the Blue Flag award would not affect their decision, further analysis of the comments indicates that this does not represent the full picture. 122 respondents expanded on their answer and of the respondents who commented:

11.5% said that they would visit the beach regardless of the award as they lived nearby, or the beach was sentimental to them. This shows that convenience and sentimentality are important to the public regardless of certification.

10.7% said that they did consider factors of the Blue Flag programme despite stating that the award would not influence their decision. Comments included:

“It makes me more confident that it is safe to swim”.

“The certification indicates to users that the beach is clean and safe to use”.

“If a beach did not have a Blue Flag, I would do more research to find out why”.

33.6% of respondents gave a neutral response.

- 8.2% indicated that they did not know whether beaches they visit had a Blue Flag or not.
- 8.2% of respondents stated that they do not swim in the sea which is why they are not concerned about whether the beach has a Blue Flag or not.

Out of those who indicated no, **less than 15% were critical of the Blue Flag award**. Out of the critical comments, 3 themes emerged:

- 6.6% referenced that they could not choose a Blue Flag beach as the beaches near them did not have the award due to a lack of lifeguards and/or facilities.
- 5.7% had concerns over the Blue Flag award and its validity due to recent sewage releases into the sea.
- 2.5% said that they felt that the Blue Flag award often meant lots of tourists.

We also asked participants if their decision to visit a beach would be affected if it no longer had a Blue Flag award. 10.8% of participants stated that it would, with a further 43.6% stating it possibly would. 41.4% stated it would not and 4.1% of participants did not know. Therefore, over 50% of participants state that the loss of a Blue Flag **could** affect their decision to visit a beach.

A small number of studies have explored various aspects of the Blue Flag Award and how it relates to an individual's decision to visit a particular beach¹⁰. Many of these studies reflect findings from our survey results, most notably that beaches have a special role in many of our lives and can be affected by the tangible (i.e., facilities, transport, shops) and the intangible (i.e., the sense of place, memories and reputation). Secondly, studies have shown that people who visit non-Blue Flag beaches are motivated to do so largely by the same criteria as visitors who actively seek out Blue Flag beaches, primarily factors of cleanliness and safety¹¹. This shows that the underlying criteria of the Blue Flag award is important even if it does not affect decision making. However, it stands to reason that a visible reduction in environmental quality could have an impact on visitor numbers and therefore have negative economic impacts on coastal communities.



Sustainability

This year, new questions regarding the importance of sustainability were added to the survey to understand whether tourists value sustainability when booking a holiday. 29.7% of responses stated that sustainability was very important, 52.8% stated it was somewhat important (Figure 9). 15.2% said that it was not that important whilst only 2% stated that it was not at all important. Therefore, over 83% of people state that sustainability has a degree of importance when choosing holidays providers and accommodation and shows that this will become increasingly important for businesses in the future.

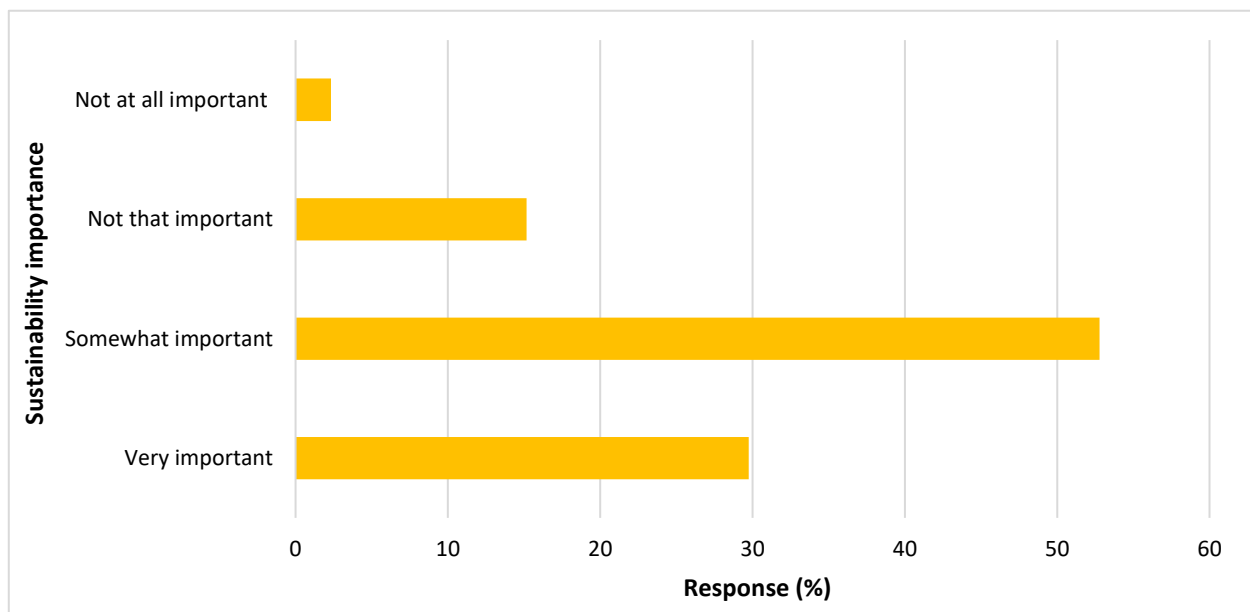


Figure 9 The percentage of respondents who find sustainability important when choosing holiday providers and accommodation.

Further, the survey asked what specific factors are important when choosing a holiday. Independent businesses are most important to those who value sustainability when choosing a holiday (56.9%), whilst 55.7% value businesses that promote activities that support wildlife or nature. Businesses with a local merit or tourism award were important to 30.9% of respondents. 47.4% value businesses with plastic free policies and 28.8% appreciate businesses that have a national environmental or sustainability award (Figure 10).

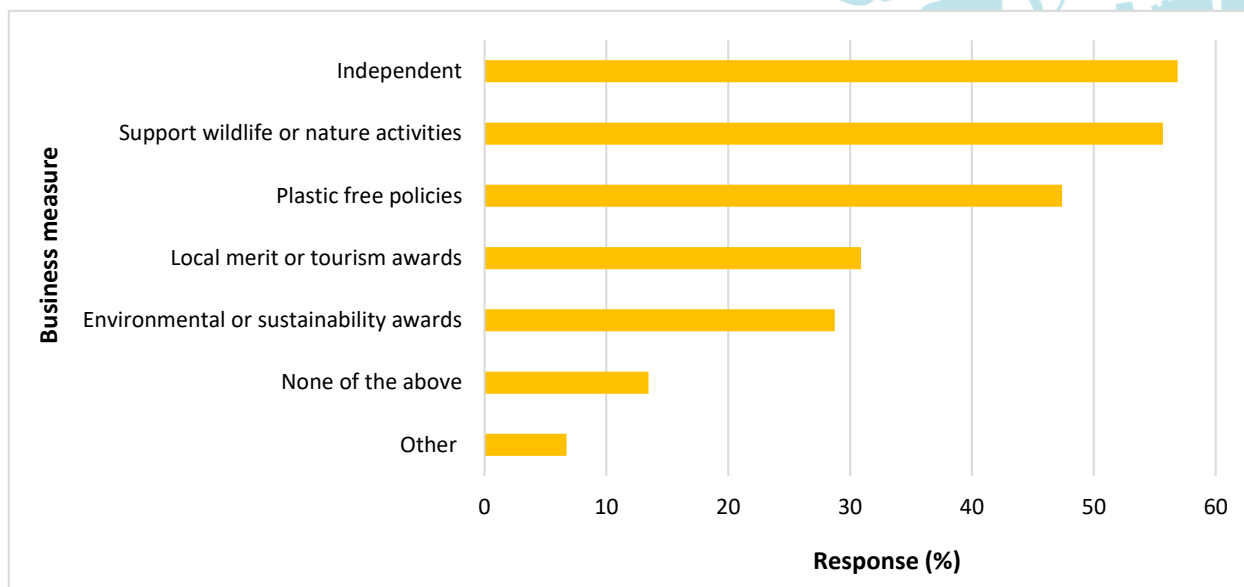


Figure 10 The measures that respondents value when choosing a holiday.

6.7% of respondents chose ‘other’. These responses could be categorised as:

- 41% mentioned businesses, whilst 18% discussed supporting local. Again, this indicates the importance of independent business availability when travelling.
- 27% mentioned the sustainability of the area and/or place itself.
- 14% discussed available facilities. This result inadvertently shows further value for Blue Flag criterions.

General Comments

Over 25% of respondents gave additional feedback on the survey. None of the additional comments were negative towards the Blue Flag award. 19.8% of people discussed tourism and visitors while 38% either gave positive feedback about the award or made suggestions on how to improve beaches and the environment.

“Clean the water up”.

“More litter bins and public toilets needed, especially on the beach”.

“There needs to be a more coordinated approach to beach cleans and the collection of litter”.

“Water companies need to stop pumping sewage into our rivers”.

“Ban cheap body boards filled with polystyrene”.

“Stop sale of bottled water have more refill stations for water”.

“People will not come to the beach if they can only park for a short period or risk a fine”.

“I would really love to see a complete ban on disposable barbecues on beaches”.

Business Perceptions of the Blue Flag Award

Alongside the public survey, a smaller survey was carried out face-to-face with businesses that operated on or near a Blue Flag beach. The surveys were carried out between January and March 2023, gathering a total number of 58 responses around Wales (Anglesey, Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Vale of Glamorgan). When possible, surveys were carried out with the business owner or senior members of staff.

Business Survey Results

- 79.3% of business respondents had heard of the Blue Flag award.
- 72.4% of business respondents knew where the closest Blue Flag beach was.
- Beach cleanliness and water quality were the most known award criteria.
- Over three-quarters of business respondents believe the Blue Flag attracts visitors to the area.
- Over 80% of businesses do not promote any Blue Flag information.

Who took part in the survey?

The respondents represented a diverse range of sectors (Figure 11), and most businesses were independently owned. 'Other' business types included camping or caravan sites, information centres or kiosks, self-catering accommodation and ready-to-eat food stores.

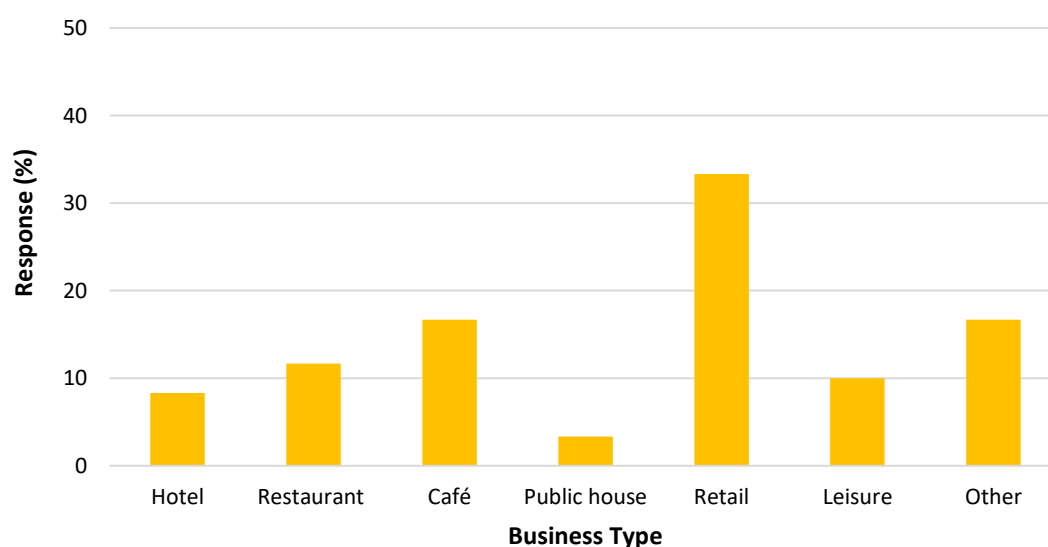


Figure 11 The percentage of respondents by business type.

Awareness and Understanding of the Blue Flag Award

79.3% of business respondents had heard of the Blue Flag award and 72.4% stated that they knew the closest Blue Flag beach to their premises. The majority of businesses believed that the Blue Flag award stood for water quality (77.6% of respondents) and beach cleanliness (86.2%). Only 39.7% understood it to represent facilities and 31% for public safety (Figure 12).

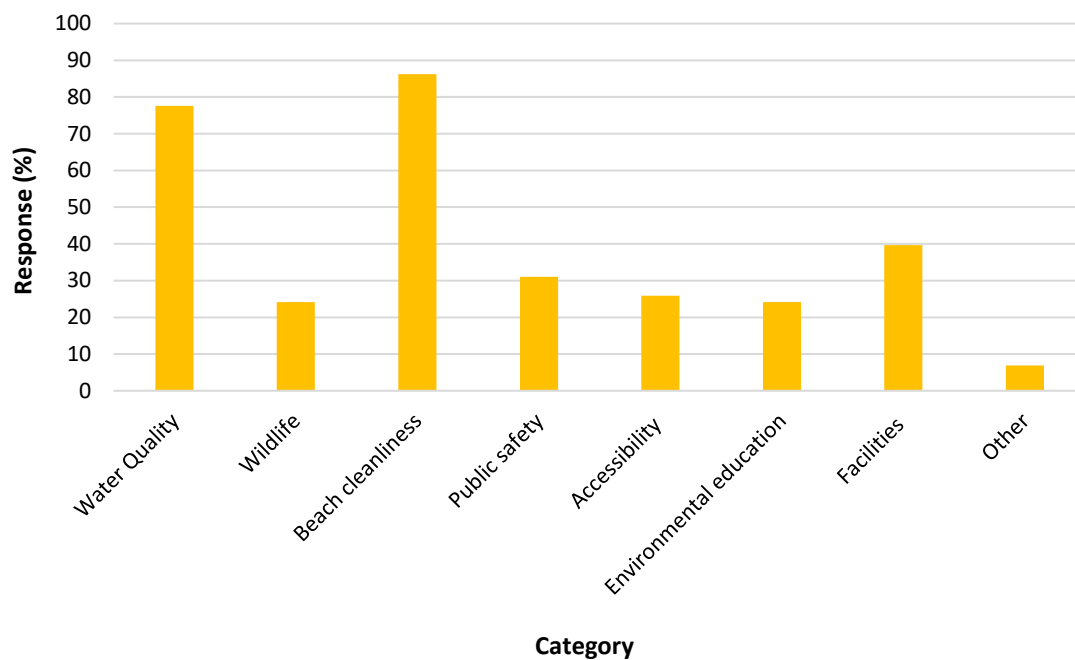


Figure 12 Business respondent opinions on what the Blue Flag represents.

Business Impacts

Significantly, over 75% of business respondents believe the Blue Flag award attracts visitors to their area and 63.8% think that the award brings additional benefits to their business. Despite the limited proactive promotion from coastal businesses, the general comments about the award were overwhelmingly positive.

”

“Visitors from outside Wales will visit specifically for facilities and Blue Flag beach.”

“

“Blue Flag is fantastic.”

Other comments included:

“More should be done to raise the profile of the Blue Flag programme.”

“People automatically think a Blue Flag loss is due to water quality which is a worry.”

“Water companies are dumping too much waste into the sea” and “Blue Flag is becoming less relevant due to dumping as business is affected with days of poor water quality.”

“We need investment to maintain the standard.”

“Dogs should be allowed on beach year-round.”

Businesses can find Blue Flag promotional materials in our [Blue Wales Digital Toolkit](#).



Feel safe, run free, have fun





Conclusions

The Blue Flag programme has undoubtedly provided an incentive to improve environmental quality and environmental education in coastal areas and generally, the awareness of the Blue Flag award is high amongst the public and coastal businesses in Wales. It is also encouraging that most comments about the award were positive, and a high percentage of further comments were about improving the environment in local communities.

Generally, there are some gaps in the knowledge about environmental awards, but the awareness of the Blue Flag award was significantly higher than other eco-awards in Wales. In most circumstances, having little to no awareness or understanding of these awards does not signify a lack of concern for high environmental standards. For example, many of the respondents who had no awareness of the Blue Flag award still valued indicators such as water quality and beach cleanliness. Also, as the presence of the Blue Flag could impact the decision to visit a certain beach, it has the power to affect the surrounding businesses and communities, socially and economically. This shows just how important it is for local authorities, landowners and beach managing committees to always strive for environmental excellence and quality education.

As both residents and visitors are becoming increasingly aware and concerned with environmental quality, it is important that we continue to work with and educate communities about eradicating waste, preserving and protecting local ecosystems and adopting sustainable practises. The interaction and promotion of eco-awards will naturally increase awareness and knowledge, which was illustrated post survey as many businesses stated that they would now advertise that they were near a Blue Flag beach after learning new information. Further, the continued collaboration within and across organisations will deliver positive change for the future, examples including the enhancement of ocean literacy across society or researching the links between environmental exposure and well-being. The environmental excellence that the Blue Flag represents is but one example of the high standards to work towards, as [other awards](#) also share the same principles. It is important that our collaborative and community efforts to protect our environment continue to grow to conserve the diversity and beauty of our natural spaces in Wales, now and for the future.

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Appendix 1

Award Winning Beaches in Wales 2022

County	Blue Flag Award Beaches
Bridgend	Rest Bay, Trecco Bay
Carmarthenshire	Cefn Sidan
Ceredigion	Aberystwyth South, Tresaith, Llangrannog, Borth
Denbighshire	Prestatyn Central
Pembrokeshire	Amroth, Newgale, Saundersfoot, Dale, Whitsands, Coppet Hall, Tenby South, Tenby Castle, Poppit Sands, Broadhaven North
Swansea	Langland Bay, Caswell Bay, Port Eynon
Vale of Glamorgan	Southerndown
	Blue Flag Marinas
Bridgend	Porthcawl
Swansea	Swansea
Vale of Glamorgan	Penarth

County	Green Coast Award Beaches
Anglesey	Silver Bay, Rhoscolyn
Ceredigion	Cilborth, Llanrhystud, Mwnt, Penbryn
Pembrokeshire	Abereiddy, Freshwater East, Manorbier, Penally, Caerfai, Druidstone, West Angle Bay
Swansea	Bracelet Bay

County	Seaside Award Beaches
Anglesey	Llanddonna
Ceredigion	Aberystwyth North, New Quay Harbour, Aberporth, Clarach, Traeth y Dolau, Borth, Llangrannog, Tresaith, Cilborth, Llanrhystud, Mwnt, Penbryn, Aberystwyth South
Conwy	Abergele Pensarn, Kinmel Bay, Llandudno North Shore
Denbighshire	Rhyl Central
Gwynedd	Criccieth Traeth y Promenade
Neath Port Talbot	Aberavon
Vale of Glamorgan	Whitmore Bay, Jacksons Bay, Cold Knap

Appendix 2

Welsh Beaches and Tourism Survey Questions (Public)

This is a transcript of the survey which was available on Survey Monkey. The survey was available in English and Welsh.

Welsh Beaches and Tourism Survey 2022-23

Thank you for completing this Keep Wales Tidy survey on Welsh beaches and tourism. Keep Wales Tidy is a charity working across Wales to protect our environment for now and for the future. To be able to do this we need to have a clear understanding of the way in which residents and visitors feel about different elements of our Welsh environment. This survey has been designed to help us to collect this information about our beaches and the areas around them so that we can support local councils, residents and businesses to create sustainable and environmentally friendly spaces. The survey is anonymous, and we would ask you to give your honest thoughts. The more responses we can gather, the more insightful the information, so if you know of friends, family or colleagues who would be willing to complete this survey, then please do forward it on to them.

What is your home location?

What is your age? <18/18-24/25-34/35-44/45-54/55-64/65+

What is your gender? Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to say

1. Thinking of your favourite beach in Wales, would you normally:

Go on a day trip

Go on holiday to the area

N/A – I live close to the beach

N/A – I don't visit beaches

2. What do you like about this beach in particular? (Please tick all that apply)

Clean

Safe

Parking is easy

Convenient location for other areas of interest

Wildlife

Lifeguards are present

Good for watersports

Good for dog-walking

Good space for children

Access to walking routes

The views

Peaceful

Safe for swimming

Other – Please specify:

3. Have you heard of the Blue Flag Award?

I have and I know what it is

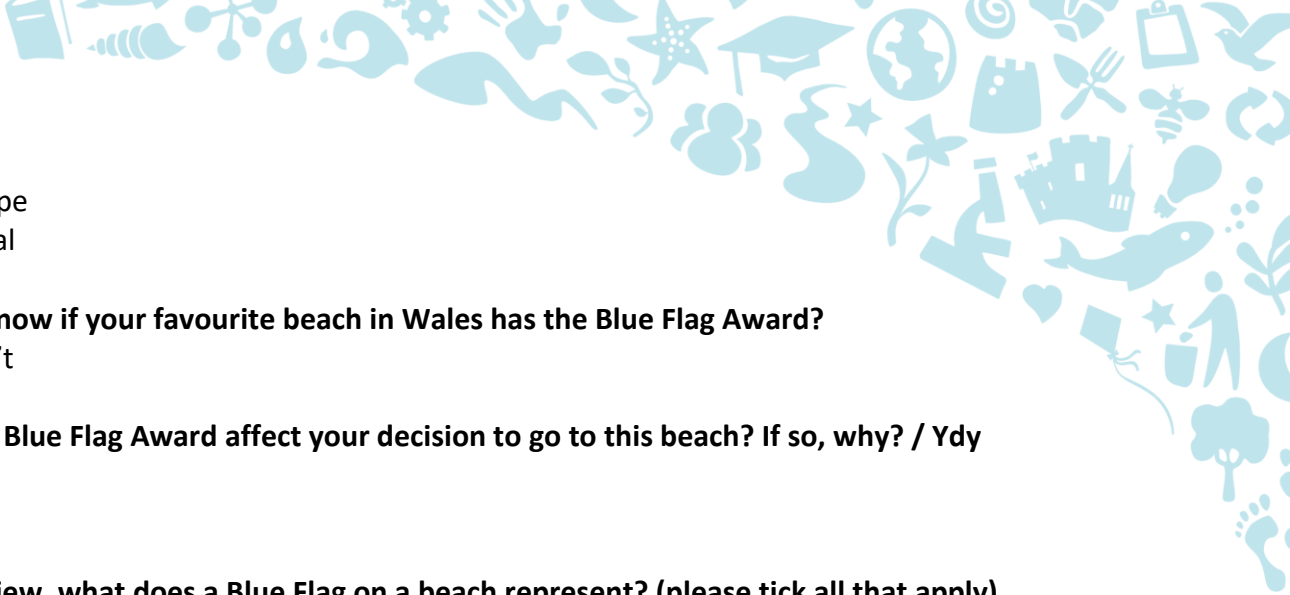
I have heard about it but I don't know what it is

I haven't heard about it

Don't Know

4. Do you think that the Blue Flag Award is:

Just in the UK



Just in Europe
International
Don't Know

5. Do you know if your favourite beach in Wales has the Blue Flag Award?

No it doesn't

Don't know

6. Does the Blue Flag Award affect your decision to go to this beach? If so, why? / Ydy

Yes

No

Don't know

7. In your view, what does a Blue Flag on a beach represent? (please tick all that apply)

Water quality

Beach cleanliness

Environmental education and information present on the beach

Public safety (e.g. lifeguards on duty)

Accessibility

Facilities (e.g. public toilets, water fountain)

Wildlife

Other (Please state)

8. Please state which of the above criteria is the most important to you

9. If you heard that a beach no longer had a Blue Flag Award, would that affect your decision to visit the beach?

Yes

No

Possibly

Don't know

10. Have you heard of the Green Key award?

I have and I know what it is

I have heard about it but I don't know what it is

I haven't heard about it

Don't Know

11. Have you heard of the Eco-Schools programme?

I have and I know what it is

I have heard about it but I don't know what it is

I haven't heard about it

Don't Know

12. Have you heard of the Green Flag Award for parks?

I have and I know what it is

I have heard about it but I don't know what it is

I haven't heard about it

Don't Know

13. How important is sustainability to you when choosing holiday providers and accommodation?

Very important

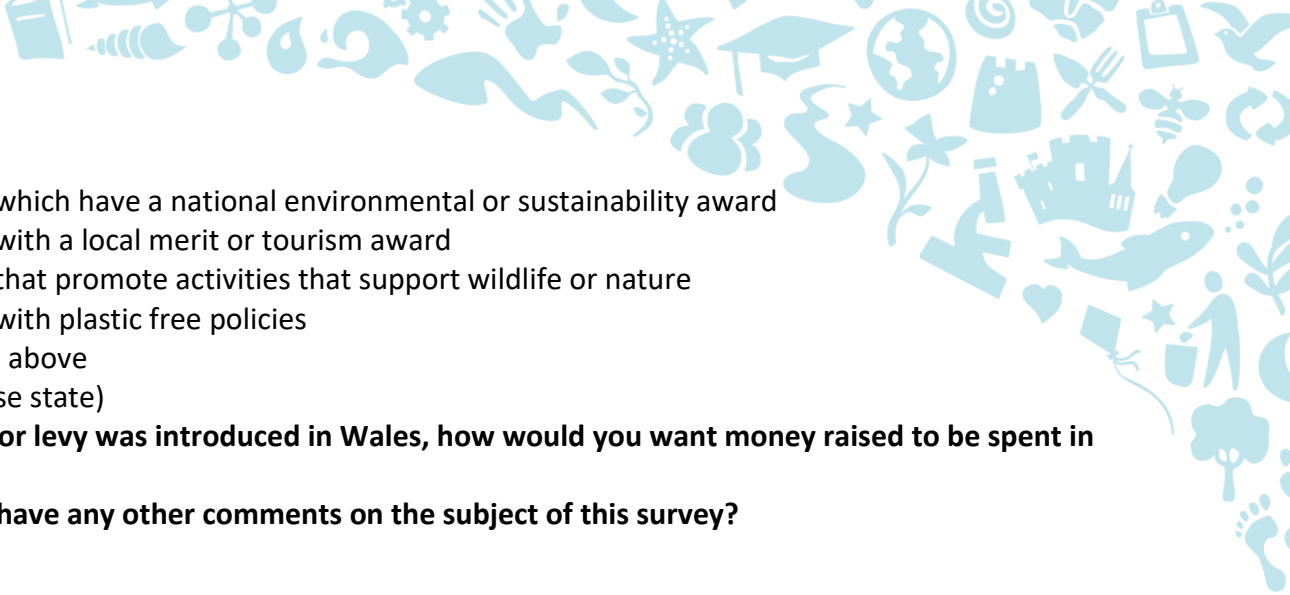
Somewhat important

Not that important

Not at all important

14. When planning a visit, which of these factors are important to you? (Please tick all that apply)

Independent businesses



Businesses which have a national environmental or sustainability award
Businesses with a local merit or tourism award
Businesses that promote activities that support wildlife or nature
Businesses with plastic free policies
None of the above
Other (please state)

15. If a visitor levy was introduced in Wales, how would you want money raised to be spent in the area?

16. Do you have any other comments on the subject of this survey?

Appendix 3

Blue Flag Business Survey Questions

This is a transcript of the survey which was available on Survey Monkey. The survey was available in English and Welsh.

Blue Flag Business Survey 2022-23

Thank you for taking part in this Keep Wales Tidy survey about the Blue Flag Award for beaches. It should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

Keep Wales Tidy is a charity working across Wales to protect our environment now and for the future. This survey has been designed to help collect this information about our beaches and the areas around them so we can support local councils, residents and businesses to create sustainable and environmentally friendly spaces.

This survey is anonymous and your answers are confidential. We would appreciate your honest thoughts and opinions.

Location:

Date/Time:

Local Authority:

Business name (optional):

Business type:

Hotel

B&B

Restaurant

Café

Public house

Retail

Leisure

Other (please specify):

1. Have you heard of the Blue Flag Award for beaches?

Yes

No

Don't know

2. What do you think the Blue Flag Award stands for?

Water quality

Wildlife

Beach cleanliness

Public safety (e.g. lifeguards on duty)

Accessibility

Environmental education and information present on the beach

Facilities (e.g. public toilets)

Other (Please state):

3. Do you know where the closest Blue Flag beach is from here?

Yes (Please detail):

No

4. Do you think the Blue Flag beach attracts visitors to this area?

Yes

No



Not sure

5. Do you think the Blue Flag Award brings additional benefits to your business?

Yes

No

Not sure

6. (If applicable) Do you promote any Blue Flag Award information from your business?

Yes

No

Not sure

7. Do you think a beach losing its Blue Flag would have an impact on your business?

Yes

No

Not sure

8. Have you heard of other voluntary awards such as the Seaside Award or Green Flag?

Yes (Please detail):

No

9. The Welsh Government are introducing a Visitor Levy on visitor accommodation. This is a small charge added to accommodation charges to raise money to support visitor destinations. What do you think this should be spent on?

10. Any other comments:

Thank you for taking part in this survey. If you would like to find out more about our work or contact us, please visit www.keepwalestidy.cymru.



Appendix 4

Keep Wales Tidy official statement for counties with Blue Flag losses for 2022 bathing season

We have received final notification from the international Blue Flag jury that despite our ongoing conversations with them, a number of beaches across Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy will not be awarded a Blue Flag for the 2022 bathing season.

The beaches in question have achieved the highest environmental standards that are required by Blue Flag. However, the international jury have reinforced the decision that on beaches where there are an average of more than 50 beach users a day over a period of 4 weeks during the high season and where there are no lifeguards provided, then a safety risk assessment must be carried out by a recognised professional independent assessor or by a Full Member organisation of the International Life Saving Federation (ILS). Therefore, a safety risk assessment made in-house by the Blue Flag applicant is deemed non-compliant with the Blue Flag criteria.

In previous years, applications for Blue Flag were approved with reference to robust risk assessments that were undertaken by competent, trained internal risk assessors. However, despite the submission of additional supporting information, the 2022 applications were not approved by the International Jury as they did not adequately address the requirement for an independent assessment.

All parties involved recognise that achieving these criteria is an important element in ensuring that the standards of excellence which underpin the Blue Flag award for over 5,000 Blue Flag beaches around the world are maintained. Conversations will continue to outline, in a full and timely manner, all future Blue Flag requirements to ensure that beaches in North West Wales meet these criteria.



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