

## What is Fair?

## Trends and Responses to Fairtrade and Ethical Consumerism in Inverness

### Summary Report

In 2014, the Inverness Fairtrade Group produced a guide to outlets that stock Fairtrade products in and around Inverness. The purpose was to raise awareness about Fairtrade and help consumers identify its availability in the local area. This guide comprised 34 outlets that stocked 3 or more products carrying the Fairtrade label, including 17 shops and 17 cafes.

In 2019, it was decided to update this guide and so the Inverness Fairtrade Group commissioned an independent researcher to conduct a study of the number of outlets carrying Fairtrade products today. This took the form of both quantitative and qualitative research, documenting the types of products carried in local establishments, where they are available, and the reasons behind these choices.

In our research

- 59 outlets (including shops and cafes) were approached to find out which ones carry products with the Fairtrade mark, and if so which items. Out of those approached:
- nearly half (22) stocked 3 or more Fairtrade products
- 13 stocked only 1 or 2
- 24 didn't stock any at all.

This indicates that there has been a slight drop in the overall number of establishments carrying Fairtrade products in Inverness. In fact, Inverness is not alone in this decline. A recent study carried out by the Scottish Government at the end of 2019 found a similar trend across Scotland, with a 9% decrease in sales of Fairtrade products between November 2017 and November 2019.<sup>1</sup>

However, Fairtrade products are still widely available in Inverness and 'ethical consumerism' still seems to be a growing concern. It is the *distribution* of Fairtrade products that has perhaps seen the biggest change.

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 3 of the study for an overview of the Fairtrade market in Scotland:  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/2019-review-fair-trade-scotland/pages/5/>

Out of the outlets carrying 3 or more Fairtrade products in Inverness in 2019, it was found that the majority were **shops (59%)** compared to **cafes (41%)**. This suggests that in places where more choice of products is available, Fairtrade still continues to have a strong presence. However, in places where only one or two brands are available, such as in cafes, there appears to be a general trend towards Fairtrade products being replaced by other brands. On the whole, these alternative brands still fall into the category of 'ethical goods', whether they be environmentally friendly, vegan or otherwise. In this case, it generally tended to be Fairtrade coffee that had been replaced by other brands.

In addition, the research sought to try and explain the reasons behind this shift. In Inverness, the decline in the popularity of Fairtrade products can be attributed to **3 general factors**:

- **Environmental concern** was by far the strongest motivation for shops and cafes to switch from Fairtrade products to more avowedly environmental products. Though Fairtrade products can themselves be seen as environmentally friendly, the general shift in public discourse towards protecting the environment appears to have motivated shop and café owners to stock products that more obviously conform to this ethical principle.
- An increased emphasis on supporting **locally produced goods**. As these products more obviously signalled efforts to 'support local', there is an assumption amongst many retailers that they are more favourable to both tourists and local consumers alike.
- **Brand confusion** between various different ethical labels, which though similar, adhere to slightly different ethical principles. This suggests that the specific brand of Fairtrade products, which follow a strict set of principles set by the Fairtrade Foundation, are mistaken as simply belonging to a much more general category of fairly traded goods. In this case, Fairtrade can be seen as a trailblazer in the market of ethical consumerism but may currently be lagging behind other players in the field.

A more detailed breakdown of both the quantitative and qualitative findings can be accessed in the accompanying report. A brief guide to the main ethical labels that can be found in Inverness can also be consulted for more clarity on the differences between various types of ethical consumerism.

Lauren Pyott  
April 2020