



THE STATE OF STYLE *2026*

**HOW WE SHOP, WEAR
AND VALUE CLOTHES**

AN ANNUAL ASSESSMENT BY OXFAM



OXFAM



CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY BAY GARNETT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
DRESSED BY 'THE FEED'	5
THE FORGOTTEN WARDROBE	9
THE COST OF MORE	12
BRITAIN'S MOST LOVED CLOTHES	15
A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP WITH FASHION	20

FOREWORD

BY BAY GARNETT

I found my first great charity shop piece when I was still at school - something nobody else my age owned, found for pennies, that felt like it had been waiting for me rather than made for everyone.

That was just the beginning - charity shops are where I found creativity and my sense of style. I spent my lunch breaks and weekends in thrift stores when I was working in an office in New York, back when second-hand wasn't fashionable and nobody else was looking. Some of what I found has stayed with me for thirty years - including a charity shop banana-print top that somehow ended up on the Chloé runway.



What I've always loved about thrifting is that nothing is decided for you. You have to look. You have to work out what's good and what suits you, you have to have intention. You're going off-grid from the rest of fashion - and that's what style actually is.

There's a real system now that encourages us to buy more, more often, and treat clothes as disposable, without a second thought. But we need to choose things that are better made and built to last. Every time we do, we're making a small argument for a different way of dressing.

That's what this report is really about: how we buy, wear, value and pass on our clothes - and what happens when we start to value them differently. Oxfam has always understood something others are only just catching up to: second-hand was never the compromise. It was always the original way to dress with intention.

Because style isn't about having more clothes. It's about knowing what you like, wearing it well, and making it last.

Bay Garnett

Celebrity stylist and Oxfam Second Hand September champion

INTRODUCTION

Fashion has changed. Have our values?

Fashion has always evolved - trends come and go, styles return, new technologies reshape how we discover and buy clothes. What feels different today is the pace.

Shopping no longer begins when we decide we need something. It increasingly starts long before that, while scrolling through social media, browsing personalised recommendations or watching the latest trend unfold online. Newness has become constant and choice has become endless.

At the same time, Britain owns more clothing than ever before, and buys more new clothes per person than any other country in Europe. Many of us are leaving more of our clothes unworn in our wardrobes than we used to and wearing garments for less time before setting them aside. The environmental consequences are significant - especially for one of our most precious resources, water - but so too are the cultural ones. As fashion becomes even faster, many people feel it is becoming less personal.

This report explores how Britain shops today, what happens to everything we buy, what all of it costs - for people and for the planet - and what a different relationship with fashion could look like. Fashion's impacts are wide-ranging and our first State of Style report focuses on water, using it as a lens to explore one of fashion's hidden impacts.

What we wear is a story with two sides, the one we see - the colour, style, brand, trend - and the one we don't - the hidden story of the water, energy and people needed to make our clothes. And it's a story Oxfam has been part of since 1947.

Long before second-hand became fashionable, before algorithms and before apps, we helped extend the life of clothing, support communities and raise funds for causes around the world - recognising that style has never only been about what we buy, but what we value.



Every Oxfam shop and online purchase supports our work worldwide, including helping communities access clean water, adapt to climate change and respond to emergencies.

THE SECOND HAND ORIGINALS *SINCE 1947*

In 1947, a small shop opened on Broad Street in Oxford, selling donated goods to raise money for post-war relief. It was the UK's first ever permanent charity shop – and it was Oxfam's. Still serving customers today, the site is now celebrated with a commemorative blue plaque to founder Cecil Jackson-Cole.

There was no language then for 'sustainable fashion', it was simply that clothes with life left in them were passed on to raise funds for people in need.

Nearly eight decades on, that idea hasn't changed – just the scale of it. Oxfam now runs over 500 shops across the UK, together helping fund our work in more than 75 countries. Every second-hand donation and sale still does exactly what it did on Broad Street: turning something no longer needed into practical support for people facing poverty and climate crisis - from helping families access clean water to supporting farmers recovering from floods and droughts, and communities preparing for future climate shocks.

Before the algorithms, before it was fashionable, that's where second-hand started. Not as a trend to follow, but as a genuinely original way of doing good, to help create a fairer world.

A brief timeline:

1947

Oxfam's first shop opens on Broad Street, Oxford

1974

Our first ever 'nearly new' fashion show,
encouraging second hand shopping

1994

The first Oxfam Festival Shop opens at
Glastonbury Festival

1996

Oxfam's 'clothes code' campaign launches, calling
for retailers to adopt a basic code of rights for those
working in the clothing industry

2007

Oxfam's online shop launches, the first dedicated
charity ecommerce site

2017

Our first ever runway show, 'Fashion Fighting
Poverty' takes place during London Fashion Week

2019

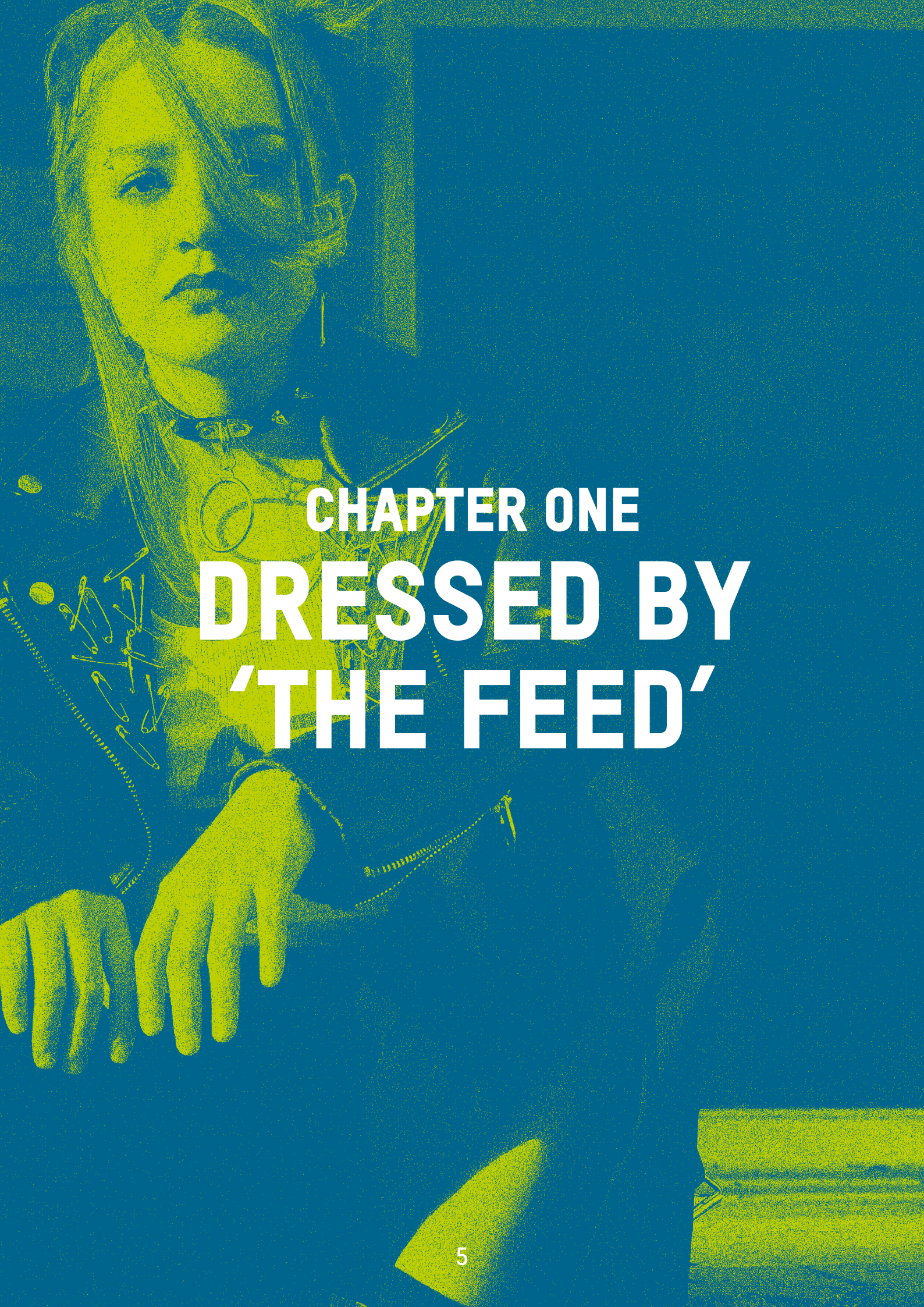
Second Hand September launches

2025

Oxfam high street and online shops raised
£98m gross income to fight poverty, inequality,
and injustice around the world

2026

Oxfam Rental launches, the UK's first national
charity-backed clothing rental service



CHAPTER ONE DRESSED BY 'THE FEED'

How we shop now

The way we shop for clothes has transformed in little more than a decade.

There was a time when discovering a new piece of clothing was a more deliberate process: a trip to the shops; a magazine spread; a friend's recommendation. That effort was, in its own way, a filter - it meant what we bought had been considered and chosen.

That filter has largely disappeared. Clothes appear between videos, alongside news stories and throughout social media feeds. Personalised recommendations, targeted advertising and rapidly changing trends mean inspiration, temptation and purchasing are often only a few taps apart.

This has democratised fashion in many positive ways. It has expanded choice, opened up second-hand markets and made style more accessible than ever, making it easier to discover both new and pre-loved clothing. But it has also accelerated the pace at which trends emerge, spread and disappear, making impulse purchases easier, too.

You can see this in how people describe shopping today. Our 2026 consumer research suggests that in today's world, many people now experience fashion as something that happens to them, rather than something they actively seek out.

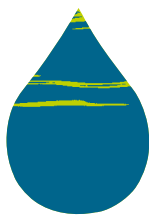
Fashion has never been more personalised. So why do so many people feel we all dress the same?

Key findings

- Almost two thirds of people (64%) buy clothing they were not actively looking for, after seeing items on social media, apps or online shopping platforms
- 57% say social media influences their clothing purchases
- A third spend less than 10 minutes deciding to buy a new item of clothing
- Almost three in five (57%) feel pressure to update their wardrobe and keep up with changing trends
- And among 18-24 year-olds, algorithms are cited as the single biggest influence on what they wear or buy by 45% - markedly higher than the 27% seen across the population as a whole

Taken together, these findings suggest Britain is navigating a fashion landscape increasingly shaped by algorithms, convenience and constant exposure. People are making choices within a shopping environment designed to capture attention and encourage frequent new purchases. The challenge is not that people have stopped valuing individuality - but that today's shopping environment often rewards speed over intention.

This influence isn't always obvious. Asked directly what influences them most when it comes to buying clothes, one in four (27%) point to algorithms or social media - price and personal style rank higher. But asked about their actual behaviour, the picture flips: 64% admit to buying things they weren't looking for after seeing them online, and three in five (59%) say they've bought something specifically because of an app's feed or recommendation. Britain doesn't feel influenced by algorithms, but its shopping habits tell a different story.



And in this frictionless shopping world, the huge environmental resources behind each new purchase remain largely invisible. Every new garment begins with raw materials, manufacturing and significant water use - costs that are rarely reflected or considered in the moment we click 'buy'. That 10-minute decision carries a cost that isn't visible in the moment - the new T-shirt bought on a whim took over 5,000 litres of water to make, drawn from rivers and groundwater long before it reached a feed.

This isn't an argument against shopping online - online marketplaces have opened up exciting new ways to discover and buy pre-loved clothing, alongside expanding choice more broadly. Rather, it suggests today's shopping environment can shape our decisions in ways we don't always notice, making it easier to buy on impulse than with intention. The challenge is not always where we shop, but how intentionally we shop.

CHAPTER TWO
THE
FORGOTTEN
WARDROBE

A wear-once economy

For all the choice available today, many wardrobes tell a different story.

New items of clothing bought in the UK are worn for an average of less than 5 days before being set aside - which means, across their lifetime, they spend nearly 1,500 days simply sitting in a wardrobe: more than 99% of their existence spent unworn.

Our new consumer research bears this out directly. The average UK wardrobe contains 80 items - and 32% of them, around 26 items, haven't been worn in the past 12 months. Based on what WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme) estimate the average clothes item costs, Britain is currently sitting on an estimated £23.5bn worth of clothing that simply isn't being worn.

And every unworn garment represents more than money sitting in a wardrobe. It also represents water that has already been taken from rivers, groundwater and communities around the world.

Britain's wardrobe in numbers

80 average items owned

32% not worn in past year

20 average new purchases a year

1 in 5 people throw clothing away rather than repairing, donating or reselling

40% admit to wearing an item once for a specific occasion, and not wearing it again

Half (**51%**) regret buying at least one new item of clothing in the past year



The water used to produce Britain's unworn clothes is enough to supply 1 million people for a lifetime.



**Our one-wear
outfits waste
the equivalent
of 88 billion
bottles of water**

These behaviours are often presented as individual failings, but our findings suggest something more complex. People want to buy and waste less (57%), and wear clothes for longer, yet many also describe buying impulsively, feeling influenced by trends and targeted by algorithms, and accumulating clothing they rarely use. Wanting to shop differently and being able to are not, it turns out, the same thing.

This is the paradox of modern fashion – we are in a system that encourages constant consumption, while leaving many people feeling less satisfied with what they own.

And it isn't only about what's kept and forgotten – a striking amount of clothing is never even sold, let alone worn, at all. Up to 40% of all clothing manufactured globally is never sold – some 46 billion garments a year, enough to provide nearly 180 new outfits for every person in the UK alone.

Oxfam analysis also shows the trajectory is worsening, not improving, and by 2050:

- The industry is on course to produce 138 billion garments a year that are never worn at all – nearly four outfits for every person on the planet

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a person lying down, reading a newspaper. The person's head is in the upper left, and their legs are in the lower right. They are wearing a dark, short-sleeved shirt with white stripes on the collar and a plaid shirt underneath. The newspaper is held open across their lap. The background is a textured, light-colored surface.

CHAPTER THREE THE COST OF MORE

The hidden resources behind every garment

Every item of clothing begins long before it reaches a wardrobe. It requires raw materials, energy, labour and vast quantities of water to produce. When clothing is worn only a handful of times - or not at all - those resources are effectively lost.

Take water. The fashion industry uses around 93 billion cubic metres of water every year globally - equivalent to 37 million Olympic-sized swimming pools. In the UK alone, the water footprint of the clothing we buy each year totals around 8 billion cubic metres: enough to meet the entire UK population's water needs for two years, or to fill Loch Ness. Producing a single pair of jeans takes around 16,000 litres of water - enough to meet the drinking needs of nearly 4,750 people for a day.

Water is not simply an environmental issue, it is increasingly a humanitarian one. Today, 2.3 billion people live in water-stressed countries, 1.8 billion people lack access to safe water at home, and nine in ten climate-related disasters are linked to water - through floods, droughts or changing rainfall patterns. While fashion is only one part of this wider picture, every decision to extend the life of clothing helps reduce demand for new production and the resources it requires.



Across many of the communities where Oxfam works, access to safe water is already one of the defining challenges of daily life. As climate change accelerates, protecting water resources is becoming essential not only for people's health, but for livelihoods, food security and resilience.

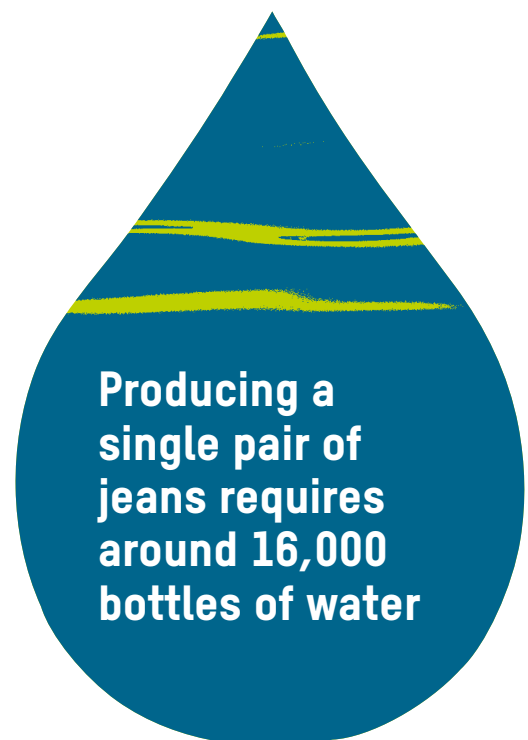
This is the cost sitting behind every 'forgotten wardrobe' - not abstract, and not distant. It's already here, embedded in what most of us are wearing right now.



Small changes can have a huge impact on the environment – and, in turn, the fight against poverty.”

Michaela Coel – actor and Second Hand September supporter

The same system driving fashion's environmental footprint is also reshaping Britain's sense of style. More than three quarters (78%) of people don't find unique clothes easy to come by today, and 83% question whether Britain has lost some of its individuality and personal style in recent years. And for many, the purchases the system produces so relentlessly don't even bring satisfaction: more than half (51%) have regretted a clothing purchase in the past year. A system built to sell more, faster, doesn't just cost the planet - it's costing Britain its sense of style, too.



A full-page background image with a blue tint. It shows a person's legs from the knees down, wearing blue denim jeans and brown leather sandals with black straps. They are standing on a light-colored, textured rug. In the background, there is a yellow bag with a large black circle on it, and a lamp with a white shade and a black base. The text "CHAPTER FOUR BRITAIN'S MOST LOVED CLOTHES" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

CHAPTER FOUR BRITAIN'S MOST LOVED CLOTHES

84% believe what they wear reflects who they are and what they value

What we value

The choices we make after clothes are produced matter. Extending the life of clothing remains one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce demand for new production.

And for all the speed of modern fashion, the clothes people cherish most tend to have one thing in common: they last.

They are worn again and again, they are repaired rather than replaced and they carry memories, tell stories and often become more valuable over time - not because of their price, but because of what they represent.

Our research suggests that across Britain, people continue to value clothes that last, feel unique and reflect who they are.

If every person in the UK bought just one pair of jeans second-hand, together we'd save around one trillion bottles of water

Key findings

- Three in five (58%) regularly wear an item they have owned for more than five years.
- A third (33%) have repaired, altered or upcycled clothing instead of replacing it.
- And 29% have bought second-hand or vintage specifically because it feels like a one-of-a-kind
- 84% believe what they wear reflects who they are and what they value



There's real joy in stepping away from over-consumption and learning to reuse and appreciate the clothes we already have. It's not just good for the planet - it's the most original thing you can do. And nothing kills a high street faster than every shop selling the same thing. Second-hand is the one place that never will."

Eunice Olumide MBE, supermodel, activist and Second Hand September supporter

JAY'S LEATHER JACKET

Found

While second-hand shopping in Tenby

Story

"I bought this original 90s leather jacket whilst second-hand shopping on holiday in Tenby. I absolutely LOVE its worn-in patina, chunky zip and details you just don't get on clothing anymore. I couldn't help but feel smug when I saw many a high street shop trying to recreate it brand new."



CAROLINE'S VINTAGE LACE TOP

Found

In Oxfam Brighton, five years ago

Story

"This is my go-to summer top. It's such a simple vintage top that I can wear with anything. I wore it to see Moby last week and three people asked me where it was from!"



ARIE'S WESTERN JEANS

Found

In a charity shop

Story

"I'm not sure whether they're from the '70s or a '90s take on '70s western style, but I love the cowboy-inspired details. They're such a fun piece to wear and are unlike anything I'd have found buying new."



SARAH'S VINTAGE DRESS

Story

"I love my vintage St Michael drop waist dress. The quality in the fabric, design and construction is amazing. This dress cheers me up, always gets loads of compliments and, of course, it has pockets!"



ANNA'S HAND-ME-DOWN SILK SCARF

Passed down

From my grandma

Story

"This was my grandmother Alice's silk scarf. She was one of the first supporters of a fledgling Oxfam in the 1940s, setting up and chairing Oxfam in Rotherham. It's precious to me because it reminds me of her, and I don't want to stash it away unworn. She chose this little square of silk, and it still links us today."



ROS'S WOOL COAT

Found

On Oxfam's Online Shop

Story

"I found this gorgeous wool Jaeger coat on the Oxfam Online Shop and bought it at the height of summer ready for next winter. The quality is amazing and it just shows that shopping out of season means you can find some amazing pieces."



CHAPTER FIVE
A DIFFERENT
RELATIONSHIP
WITH FASHION

Choosing better

Fashion's environmental impact is significant, but so is its potential for change.

A different relationship with fashion does not mean caring less about clothes, it means valuing them differently - buying fewer pieces, wearing them for longer, repairing what we already own and passing clothes on so they can continue their story.

Long before second-hand became mainstream, people understood this instinctively. Charity shops - powered by volunteers - helped extend the life of clothing, supported local communities and high streets, and raised funds for causes around the world.

That idea remains just as relevant today. In a world of endless choice, perhaps the most original thing we can do is choose clothes with meaning. Because style has never only been about what we buy, it is about what we value.



Original style isn't about buying more. It's about finding pieces with a story, keeping them for as long as you can, and passing them on for someone else to discover. We've already got too much of everything. Reusing and upcycling clothing - second-hand, vintage, call it what you like - just makes perfect sense."

Richard E. Grant, actor and Second Hand September supporter



THE SECOND HAND STYLE MANIFESTO

- 1. Buy for your wardrobe, not your feed.**
- 2. Look for what's already out there.**
- 3. Repeat outfits proudly.**
- 4. Repair before replacing.**
- 5. Choose individuality over trends.**

Sources and references

- European Clothing Action Plan (2018) - [Used Textile Collection in European Cities](#)
- WRAP (2024) - [Textiles Market Situation Report 2024](#)
- Oxfam GB (2024) - [Oxfam clothing research 2024](#)
- Oxfam GB (2025) - [Oxfam clothing research 2025](#)
- Oxfam GB (2026), State of Style 2026. Behavioural and attitudinal data is based on market research conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Oxfam GB among 3,037 nationally representative adults in the UK aged 18+ between 10 and 17 July 2026
- Oxfam GB (2026) - [The hidden water cost of UK wardrobes and consumer behaviour in the age of fast fashion](#)
- European Commission, (2025) - [Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules for Apparel and Footwear \(PEFCR\)](#). The rules provide a science-based method for assessing the environmental impact of apparel and footwear across their lifecycle.
- Office for National Statistics (2025) - [Population estimate for the UK: mid-2025](#).
- WRAP (2022) - [Citizen Insights: Clothing Longevity and Circular Business Models Receptivity in the UK](#)
- UK Government (2025) - [Average daily water use in the UK](#)
- WRAP (2017) - [Valuing Our Clothes](#)
- Office for National Statistics (2022) - [UK average life expectancy, 2020–2022](#)

Methodology: Oxfam estimates and calculations are based on the sources above. Full methodology is provided in Oxfam GB's Second Hand September 2026 Methodology Note.

LOOKING AHEAD

The State of Style is the first in an annual series. Each year, Oxfam will build on this evidence base to track how Britain's relationship with fashion evolves, creating a richer understanding of the choices we make, the systems that shape them and the opportunities to build a fashion future that is more individual, more circular and more sustainable.



OXFAM