



Appendix 1: WEFDC Customer Research and Key Insights Review

Published: February 2025

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1. Customer research key insights

Providing a vital public service gives us the opportunity to interact with tens of thousands of water consumers and wider stakeholders every year. The Water Efficiency in Faith and Diverse Communities (WEFDC) project took us on a journey to engage with communities we serve that have not previously engaged with in such depth.

Working with two expert, independent research partners, this opportunity allowed us to conduct our most in-depth research programme with people from different faith communities (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh). The main objective was to fully understand how we can effectively engage and support these communities to reduce their water consumption in practical and sensitive ways. We outline a summary of our journey to achieve this objective and what we learnt along the way in this document.

This project builds on our commitment in our Price Review 2024 (PR24) business plan [customer engagement strategy](#) to continue to engage with our customers, wider stakeholders and to reach more communities that have traditionally been underrepresented and viewed as 'harder to engage'. In particular, we have maintained our approach to ensuring high-quality engagement which ensures the research outputs can be relied upon in decision making. We have also taken care to highlight where further research needs to be carried out by water companies to build off the research programme completed during the course of the WEFDC project.

1.1 Approaches we used to engage on the WEFDC project

To ensure we heard from as many voices as possible, within the constraints of the overall WEFDC project scope and budget, we used a range of different engagement approaches.

We provided our independent research partners with detailed briefs to help them determine the best way to structure the methodology of the research studies undertaken. We also drew on the insights acquired through the up-front academic research study undertaken by [University of Cambridge \(2023\)](#) to ensure the research was conducted in a way that was engaging, whilst being sensitive to exploring complex and often emotive subjects around faith and culture. This highlighted that we needed a strong focus on ensuring that consumers and stakeholders could take part in a way that would best suit their personal circumstances and to ensure we did not engage in a way that might offend, single out, or be viewed as othering.

Following the release of the University of Cambridge study final report, there were two main research studies undertaken. These were independently facilitated by Blue Marble (Cambridge Water's Young Innovators' Panel) and Explain Research (WEFDC qualitative research). Both studies were designed to follow Ofwat and CCW best practice guidance for high-quality research and were challenged by the Independent Challenge Group (ICG) Chair. This helped to ensure the approach and materials used to engage customers were unbiased and clear. The research outputs were also shared for review and challenge as the project progressed.

In table **1** below, we detail the different research approaches used throughout the WEFDC project and the timeline in which they took place. The whole programme was designed so that each study built on the previous one, to reduce the potential for duplication of insights, focus on gaps in knowledge as they emerged and to ensure audiences that were identified as important to engage with were included. For each study, we have provided links to the final report

For example, the University of Cambridge study identified the need for further research to be carried out to include female voices within diverse communities and also to ensure voices from different generations were included. Subsequently the focus of our Cambridge Water Young Innovators' Panel (2024) was to bring future customer voices into water company decision making. The research led by Explain was carefully structured to include participants aged 18 upwards and to ensure female voices were represented in the discussions and ethnographic activities.

The two main research studies ran in parallel to the wider community engagement activities taking place; the Wudu campaign in the Cambridge Water region and the rice washing campaign in our South Staffs region. Although the objectives of the research studies were not focused on gaining feedback on these community led campaigns, they gave the opportunity for participants to provide feedback on them if they had experienced them and any impacts these had on their daily water routines and wider views on water.

Table 1 Summary of the scope of the WEFDC customer engagement studies

Insight source	Summary of approach	Main objectives of study	Timings
<p><u>Water and / in religious relations:</u> A Cambridge study - Dr Anastasia R. Badder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive up-front literature review focusing on anthropological texts that specifically highlight water. • Ethnographic approach to the fieldwork stage focusing on Jewish and Muslim communities in the Cambridge area - fieldwork period covered, seven Jewish and Muslim organisations, with 19 interviews and / or ‘instrumental conversations’ (Madden 2010), one participation in 12 key events, four project meetings, and four workshops sharing initial findings for feedback. • In addition to the research phase, the Cambridge Interfaith Programme also held an academic conference (Being with Water Otherwise) to discuss this area in greater depth. Key knowledge from that event was shared with stakeholders in the WEFDC project, to ensure the continued flow of insight between academic and practical domains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore new possibilities for water conservation and sustainability practices that are inspired by and / or speak to religious ways of being. 	<p>The study took place between July and November 2023.</p> <p>Conference held April 2024.</p>
<p><u>Cambridge Water’s Young Innovators’ Panel (YIP)</u> – independently facilitated by Blue Marble</p> <p>(Appendix 3)</p>	<p>Recruitment of nine students from three sixth form schools and one university in the Cambridge region – all students practised Muslim and Christian faiths, with links to Bangladesh (three), India (three), Africa (one), the Philippines (one) and Poland (one).</p> <p>Project methodology flow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre event: briefing webinar for on-boarding • Pre task activities: completed by students before the workshop – water diaries focus • Face to face workshop: immersion sessions, presentations and roundtable discussions. • Two academic students were then taken through the findings by Blue Marble and independently reviewed the project outputs to provide further input and recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deepen understanding of how South Asian / Indian subcontinent cultures use water to grow and prepare food, cook and wash / clean up. 	<p>Webinar briefing held 19 June, with the face-to-face workshop held 4 July 2024</p> <p>There were no known macro influences impacting on the research, apart from the on-going cost of living challenges.</p>
















Insight source	Summary of approach	Main objectives of study	Timings
<p>WEFDC Qualitative Research – independently facilitated by Explain Research</p> <p>(Appendix 2)</p>	<p>Three-stage qualitative methodology employed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1: five online, 2hr discussions groups with 27 participants from different faith communities (three Muslim, one Hindu and one Sikh) to explore views of water use and water efficiency. • Phase 2: follow-on digital ethnography with 10 participants from phase 1, to further explore findings and themes and gain insight on practices relating to water use in naturalistic settings. • Phase 3: four online, 2hr discussions groups with 27 participants (16 returned from phase 1 with 11 new participants) to play back findings, validate the results of our research, and mop up any further areas for exploration. The four groups covered; two Muslim, one Hindu and one Sikh. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish new channels of communication and stakeholder relationships to support ‘hard to engage’ customers. • Save water, reduce bills and increase the uptake of social tariffs and / or priority services. • Establish a more inclusive water efficiency framework and support tools for diverse customers. • Test and discuss new water saving practices and campaigns linked to faith / culture that can be adapted and scaled up across the country. 	<p>Phase 1: September 2024</p> <p>Phase 2: October into early November: 2024</p> <p>Phase 3: Late November – early December 2024</p> <p>The summer riots and the challenges around negative views of water meters and level of trust in water companies may have impacted on customer response but did not emerge strongly in the structure research discussions. These impacts but may have, in part, influenced the uptake during the community-based recruitment activities.</p>
<p>Feedback on the effectiveness of the Wudu campaign in the Cambridge region – water company led survey in partnership with Wier</p>	<p>Online quantitative survey sent to customers who had experienced a home visit as part of the Wudu campaign or been involved as an influencer or been sent a Wudu bottle: four completes, giving a 3% response rate.</p> <p>Given this is only an indicative sample, the results have been included as a low confidence triangulation insight source.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the experiences of customers who had engaged with the campaign and how it had impacted their water use behaviours and views. 	<p>December 2024 – January 2025</p>
<p>Feedback on the effectiveness of the rice washing campaign in the SSW region – water company led survey</p>	<p>Online quantitative survey sent to customers who had likely experienced the rice washing campaign – the main distribution channel was to the Gurdwara in Smethwick: five completes.</p> <p>Given this is only an indicative sample, the results have been included as a low confidence triangulation insight source.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the experiences of customers who had engaged with the campaign and how it had impacted their water use behaviours and views. 	<p>Late September – early October 2024</p>

1.2 Guiding principles of our research programme

At the centre of our research approach are our eight guiding principles when undertaking research with water consumers. These were developed for our PR24 insight programme. These principles are detailed in table 2 with a summary line of sight to how they were applied to the WEFDC research studies commissioned for the WEFDC project.

Table 2 our eight guiding principles for research and wider engagement

Guiding principle	Rationale behind principle
Targeted and meaningful	<p>Research must be targeted in areas where customers / water consumers can have a meaningful input, and their views add the most value to inform water companies' plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the WEFDC engagement undertaken was focused on how water is used and valued in different faiths and cultures and to support the practical development of future communications and engagement with customers on this subject. There is a notable potential to save millions of litres of water every day by working closely with these communities, whilst being sensitive to their faith and cultural values. We developed the WEFDC research programme to ensure it was educational and fun for our customers and the feedback gained from participants highlights that the vast majority felt this was the case. For example, 89% of the respondents who completed the feedback survey following the end of the research programme said they were satisfied with the session(s) they had participated in. The outputs from the WEFDC project demonstrate that this is an area that water consumers have lots of ideas. They feel it is important for water companies to directly engage them, from both an educational and practical perspective. They feel that this will help them reduce their water consumption in a way that fits into their daily lives (including faith and cultural practices) and also helps them to manage their water bills (if on a meter).
Robust and proportionate	<p>Our primary focus is on delivering high-quality engagement, with an emphasis on quality over quantity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our two qualitative research studies have relatively small sample bases given the overall budget constraints, but the focus of the projects was on the depth of the conversations to provide rich insights. It was also intended from the outset that further research would need to be undertaken to build a more robust evidence base to support decision making over time. The findings have highlighted where the gaps are to help ensure future research is focused effectively to deepen water companies' understanding of these communities over time. See section 1.4 and 1.5.
Inclusive	<p>We made sure that different research methodologies used were carefully selected to provide the best experience for all the participants taking part.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WEFDC engagement programme reached communities that are often not engaged on a consistent basis by water companies. Each part of the engagement programme was developed to go to where the community felt comfortable engaging (such as places of worship) and / or using research fieldwork techniques that those participating said they felt most at ease with when providing their feedback – this included all day face-to-face workshops, online focus groups and APP based feedback tools. One area to focus more on in the future is ensuring that those who are digitally disengaged can take part in the research elements of the programme – but the community engagement undertaken at places of worship and other events allowed a wide range of the community to be involved. This combined approach worked effectively to help capture a wider range of voices.
Adaptive	<p>We have developed a research programme that builds from stage to stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WEFDC project had an engagement and research programme that built from stage-to-stage, using the insights to shape the objectives of the studies that follow to ensure a clear journey, removing duplication and ensuring that learnings are captured and gaps in insight knowledge are closed. For example, the Explain qualitative research programme builds on previous studies, such as work carried out by University of Cambridge that explored water and / in religious relations (Badder 2023) and the YIP facilitated by Blue Marble. Specifically, to engage women from diverse communities and people across different generations.

<p>Customer friendly</p>	<p>Our customers should enjoy taking part in our research studies, as well as provide considered feedback to the questions we have asked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All our research has adopted the recommendations from the CCW / Blue Marble report (May 2020). The guidance on making sure that engagement is ‘meaningful’ to participants shown below. We have consistently achieved high scores from feedback surveys sent to participants during and at the end of studies, learning and improving from the occasional feedback received where we have not delivered to expectation. <table border="1" data-bbox="320 376 1075 645"> <thead> <tr> <th>Criteria</th> <th>Threshold questions</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> Ease</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I able to answer the questions that I am being asked? Is what I'm being asked to do straightforward and reasonable? </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Relevance</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the topic relevant / of interest to me? Do I actually have a view on what I am being asked? </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Listening</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I feel like the organisation that has commissioned the research is paying attention to what I say? </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Making a difference</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I think anything will happen as a result of taking part? Will taking part benefit others / the wider community? </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Financial incentive</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I receive a financial incentive for taking part? Or the prospect of a prize? </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By taking great care to ensure that all research studies presented to customers use questions and stimulus materials that are clear and free of bias. Our independent research partners all use best practice techniques to do this, and we have asked participants in the research and community engagement for their feedback. We have also taken care to ensure that any unavoidable or unintended bias in the research programme is detailed in any of the research reports. Our ICG has also challenged much of the engagement materials and project outputs. 	Criteria	Threshold questions	 Ease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I able to answer the questions that I am being asked? Is what I'm being asked to do straightforward and reasonable? 	 Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the topic relevant / of interest to me? Do I actually have a view on what I am being asked? 	 Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I feel like the organisation that has commissioned the research is paying attention to what I say? 	 Making a difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I think anything will happen as a result of taking part? Will taking part benefit others / the wider community? 	 Financial incentive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I receive a financial incentive for taking part? Or the prospect of a prize?
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<p>Transparent</p>	<p>To ensure we share insights and best practice, we will publish all our research reports and other relevant materials on our website and share them with Ofwat at the end of this project. We have also developed a toolkit for engagement for other water companies to use when engaging with diverse and faith communities.</p>												
<p>Collaborative</p>	<p>We have collaborated with customers, citizens, and stakeholders, such as faith leaders, to ensure they have played an active role in helping us shape our plans. The close collaboration with communities and research experts has been the most important part of the WEFDC project approach.</p>												
<p>Ethical</p>	<p>All our agency partners work to the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct and follow all data privacy and GDPR legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We conduct yearly audits to ensure compliance and carry out all suppliers to an end-of-project review to capture learnings and help improve subsequent research studies. 												

1.2.1 Our WEFDC engagement programme partners

The quality of the insights gained from our research relies notably on collaborating with partners who have the expertise, experience, robust and ethical processes, and a collaborative working culture. We have worked with two main independent research partners on the WEFDC project, who undertook several projects for us during PR24 / WRMP24 related to water efficiency. Important reasons for the success of the engagement programme include:

- Having a **strong group of partners** that, as well as being experts in the water sector, also work with other sectors. This brings learning into our process.
- Partners who delivered our research programme **within its timings and to budget**.
- All our **partners sharing reports** as the programme progressed to ensure they were aware of key insights that would shape the next project.
- All our **research partners engaging successfully with the ICG** and other organisations challenging the research projects, providing detailed responses to any challenges.
- Our **partners always worked to the appropriate engagement and research guidelines** and in an ethical manner.

In table 3, we list the main specialist partners who helped us deliver our engagement and research programme. We extend our thanks to them, as their valuable contributions helped us to deliver our engagement and research objectives.

Table 3 Our independent partners

Project partners	Main responsibility on the WEFDC project
Blue Marble	<p>Facilitated our YIP among 17-19 years old to deepen our understanding of how South Asian / Indian subcontinent cultures use water to; grow and prepare food, cook and wash / clean up. This also involved engaging with two academic reviewers to gain feedback on the research outputs.</p> <p>Blue Marble has expertise in engaging with future customers and have conducted a wide-ranging number of research studies relating to water efficiency over several Price Review and WRMP business planning cycles. This gave us the confidence that the YIP would provide valuable outputs.</p>
University of Cambridge	<p>Led the design and implementation of a research study among community stakeholders to explore new possibilities for water conservation and sustainability practices that are inspired by and / or speak to religious ways of being. Provided addition input into the programme as it progressed.</p> <p>This research was led by Dr Anastasia Badder on behalf of the Cambridge Interfaith Programme. It was funded by the Ofwat Innovation Fund as part of a collaboration with Cambridge Water and South Staffs Water, along with other water industry actors and ecological organisations. The University's expertise in research, water conservation and its stakeholder partnership network made it an obvious collaboration partner for the WEFDC project.</p>
Explain Research	<p>Designed and led a robust research programme involving three stages of qualitative research among people from Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities. The main objective was to gain a better understanding the most effective ways to communicate with people from different faith communities regarding their water use and water saving.</p> <p>Explain Research has expertise in qualitative research and has conducted a wide-ranging number of research studies relating to water efficiency over several Price Review cycles. This gave us the confidence that it was placed to deliver the project objectives and a key reason for selecting Explain as our preferred partner, following an extensive procurement exercise.</p>
Wier: The Agency	<p>Led the design and implementation of the community-led engagement undertaken – the Wudu campaign in our Cambridge region in conjunction with Cambridge Central Mosque and the rice washing campaign in our South Staffs region.</p> <p>Wier's knowledge and experience of implementing marketing campaigns to change consumer water use behaviours, meant it was the ideal partners for delivering the community-led engagement campaign.</p>

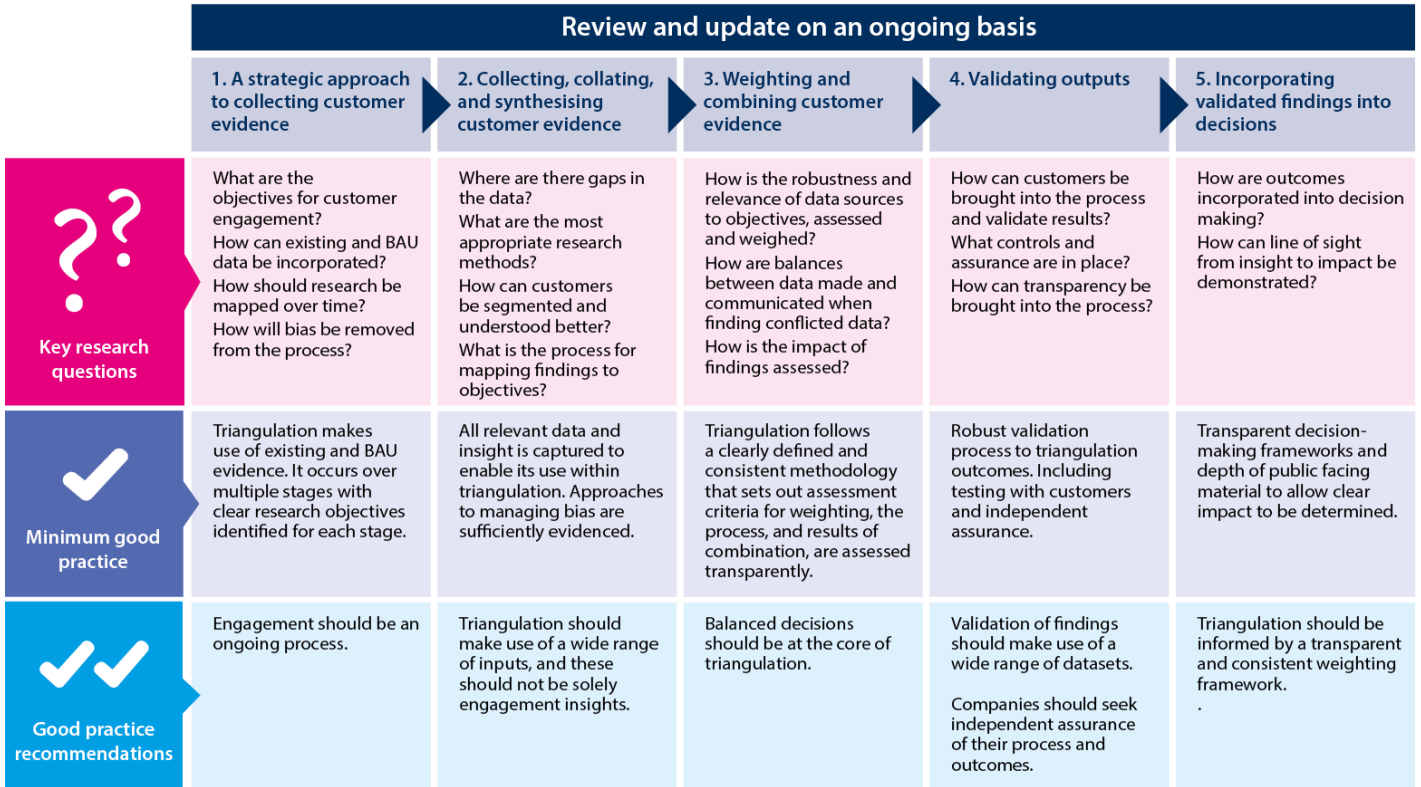
1.2.2 Our approach to insight triangulation

At the heart of our all research and wider engagement sits an approach towards triangulating of all the insights we have gained to inform decision making. Following the completion of our PR24 business planning process, we have continued to use the best practice framework put forward in the [SIA Partners / CCW report \(April 2021\)](#). The SIA / CCW framework that we have followed is shown in figure 1. Specifically, for the WEFDC project, our approach was designed around this framework:

1. That engagement with customers and communities had **clear objectives** set at each stage and was **on-going** throughout the lifetime of the project.
2. We have triangulated using a **range of high-quality insights gained from a range of research methods** to avoid over-reliance on any single source. The approach was designed so that each study feeds insights into the overall project as it progressed, adapting when appropriate based on the learnings.
3. Given that the majority of the research and insight generated and used to inform the WEFDC project is qualitative in nature, we have **adopted a thematic synthesis approach to triangulation**. Given the challenges of triangulating qualitative insights, each source has not been given any particular 'weights' in terms of their representativeness and are presented with equal importance. Respondent expertise on a particular topic has not increased or decreased the validity of any findings presented from that piece of research. The findings have simply been described with any appropriate context for interpretation e.g. the world environment at the time of the data collection or any limitations of the research identified. We have evaluated any assumptions and uncertainties by taking a balanced, rounded view of the evidence base.

4. We have **made use of a wide range of insights** from our own research studies, and those from wider reports commissioned by other water companies and wider organisations, such as University of Cambridge. Most of these have been reviewed by the ICG Chair and by other expert project partners.
5. The final outputs have generated a **toolkit framework** that can be used by other water companies to engage with faith and diverse communities. It can be challenged over time as it is used in practice and can also be refined based on the knowledge gained from on-going engagement.

Figure 1 The SIA / CCW best practice framework for robust insight triangulation which has been central to our approach



In **section 1.4** we detail the thematic reviews of the key insights learned from the WEFDC engagement and research programme.

1.3 Golden threads summary

Our PR24 business plan was underpinned by five ‘golden threads’. These golden threads form the basis for key decisions we have made in our plan to ensure we can understand the preferences our customers are expressing.

Since the completion of the PR24 business planning process, we have continued to track the golden threads through our on-going research and insight programme. We review the feedback from every source to assess whether they align to one or more of the golden threads, which helps us understand if the threads are growing, weakening or staying the same in terms of strength and if any new ones are emerging. A summary is detailed in table 4 for the insights that emerged from the WEFDC project.

Table 4 Golden threads that have informed the decision in our plans

Golden thread	Specific themes driving thread	Review of WEFDC insights relevant to thread
<p>Transparency and engagement to help customers understand the context and any impact of proposed changes to their water services and the role they can play in ensuring the best outcomes</p>	<p>Most customers want regular and effective engagement to help them understand the need for investment decisions and how these impact on their water bills and any policy changes.</p> <p>Customers who took part in our research consistently suggested that if changes to our policies and plans, such as bringing in universal metering, are to be accepted by the broader customer base, effective engagement and education will be needed to prevent dissatisfaction with their water services.</p> <p>As the challenges facing us become more widely known and customers become more informed, it increases the need for engagement to educate and support on the actions we need to take.</p> <p>The fall in trust among the public with water companies over the last 18 months will make it more challenging to engage customers.</p>	<p>Among those consulted in the Explain research – irrespective of religious background – water was viewed as a precious resource associated with key touch points across the day. Yet, despite broad agreement on its importance and value, participants admitted the availability of water as a resource can be taken for granted. The concept of water efficiency was understood in discussions as the impetus to be more aware about, and mindful of, the amount of water they are using, and then taking appropriate actions to avoid wasting it. Most had not previously considered that their water company ‘cared’ about water efficiency. People reacted positively when they were told about sustainable or environmental activities being undertaken during discussions, for example, work to protect riverbanks.</p> <p>The pre-task exercise asking the YIP students to keep a water usage diary opened their eyes to how much water is used every day for food preparation, cooking and washing up. Prior to this, students had not given their water usage much thought or consideration.</p> <p>In the Explain research there were strong views from some participants that water companies needed to do more to build trust with communities that seldom heard from them.</p> <p>These insights continue to highlight the finding running through all the PR24 research studies - the need for effective on-going engagement with customers, to help inform, educate and build trust.</p>
<p>A focus on fairness and collective action to meet water sector challenges</p>	<p>Policies that are seen to be ‘fair’ to all customers, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, are important.</p> <p>As customers become more informed, calls grow for collective responsibility to tackle the scale of the challenges we face to maintain water supplies and when tackling affordability challenges.</p>	<p>Some customers in the Explain research pointed to the fact that it could be viewed as unfair that their water company was asking them to save water, when they observe ‘high volumes’ of water lost to leaks in their community. This continues to highlight the need for water companies to be transparent about their service performance and where improvements are being made to avoid customers dis-engaging from adopting water saving behaviours.</p> <p>In the Explain research, overall, the notion that water-saving ‘benefits everyone’ (e.g. customers’ pockets and the environment) was an appealing and a motivating idea in the group discussions – again highlighting the need for collective responsibility.</p>

Golden thread	Specific themes driving thread	Review of WEFDC insights relevant to thread
<p>Concern for the environment, specifically the water environment</p>	<p>A consistent thread since 2018 and growing notably in importance by 2021 – in part, because of the publicity around COP26 and the growing awareness of the impacts on climate change on public services – e.g. more floods and prolonged periods of drought.</p> <p>The theme has been further highlighted by negative reports about the water sector in the media – from sewage pollution to a perceived lack of improvement in leakage levels.</p> <p>There is a clear view that water companies need to play a stronger role in restoring and protecting the water environment.</p>	<p>The environment continues to be an area people of all generations say they care about.</p> <p>Those with Muslim, Hindi and Sikh faiths all referenced a link between their faith and the need to protect and care for the environment. For example, the Hindu participants consulted in the Explain research project agreed that water is essential in their religious practice, but they do see themselves as already caring a lot about the environment.</p> <p>When asked about environmental causes that matter to them, students in the Cambridge Water YIP referred to waste pollution, electric vehicles and recycling. However, when prompted, students reported that they hadn't considered water saving an environmental action. The YIP continues to challenge the assumption that young people care disproportionately more about the environment than older generations.</p> <p>There was also a view though that students feel it's more important to focus on the actions of larger companies and ensure they are being sustainable and environmentally responsible.</p>
<p>The need to protect vulnerable customers</p>	<p>This thread emerged mainly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with spontaneous calls to protect customers in vulnerable customers that was not seen widely at PR19.</p> <p>The evidence for this comes from the majority of customers still supporting the need to subsidise bills for households that are struggling and the need to ensure accessible services for all.</p>	<p>This was not an area of direct focus for the engagement and so did not emerge from the conversations with participants.</p> <p>This area should be explored in more detail as engagement with these communities progresses.</p>
<p>Affordability and cost-of-living increases impacting on customers</p>	<p>This thread emerged in early 2022 as customer preferences started to become for influenced by the pressures on household bills. This caused many customers to consider their own situation and the investments they want to see us make in their water services.</p> <p>It has constrained many customers' ability to look beyond the next few months when assessing the affordability of our plans and the associated bills.</p>	<p>The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact families day-to-day. The YIP students are being informed by their parents of the rising cost of transport, groceries and energy. The impact of this is that parents are stricter on saving energy at home and are having to be more price conscious when buying day-to-day items.</p> <p>In the Explain research, the drive to save money through saving water was commonly mentioned. Indeed, saving energy or reducing energy bills was a more salient proposition for people than conserving water as a standalone concept.</p>

1.4 Summarising what customers have said about key areas to inform our plans

A key objective of the WEFDC project is to develop a greater understanding of how water is used and valued in different faiths and cultures. Our research programme was designed specifically to meet this objective, whilst supporting the other core objectives. In this section we have split the key insights into following thematic review areas:

- [Context of the research](#)
- [Cultural and religious motivations for water use and conservation](#)
- [Barriers to water-saving behaviours](#)
- [Engagement preferences and community-led approaches](#)
- [Engaging with customers about water efficiency through the lens of religion](#)
- [Best practice learnings for water companies to be aware of.](#)

It is important that all readers consider the limitations of the research studies undertaken, particularly around the important point that each community engaged with during the programme is highly diverse. A significantly larger research study would be needed to cover the breadth of cultures and religious communities in greater depth. The practicalities of undertaking research to that level of detail should not be underestimated. For this specific research programme, we are highlighting the following considerations:

- **University of Cambridge study:** the qualitative fieldwork was conducted across segments of Cambridge-based Jewish and Muslim communities and focused primarily on community leaders / experts and not general water consumers. There was limited engagement across generations and with females, key points called out in the report as consumer segments to carry out further research with.
- **Young Innovators' Panel:** this was limited to students from Muslim and Christian faiths with a connection to South Asian and Indian cultures studying in the Cambridge region. The insights therefore do not represent the full range of cultural norms, and only from the life perspective of students aged 17-19.
- **Explain's qualitative research:** each of the communities of interest consulted (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh) are highly diverse, and have a wide range of cultural norms that will not be fully captured in a qualitative project of this size. Whilst the insights generated in this report fully represent the views those taking part, they cannot be extrapolated as nationally representative, or representative of the views of all in each of the religious groups consulted. The study fieldwork was also conducted entirely online and so excludes voices of people who cannot take part in research studies online.

1.4.1 Context of the research

When considering the research findings, it is important to understand the wider macro-impacts that are potentially influencing participants' feedback during the WEFDC project. These include the following:

- The cost-of-living increases continues to impact families day-to-day. Students in the YIP are being informed by their parents of the rising cost of transport, groceries and energy. The impact of this is that parents are being stricter on saving energy at home and are having to be more price conscious when buying day-to-day items. This point was reinforced in the Explain research, where saving energy, or reducing energy bills was a more salient proposition for people than conserving water as a standalone concept. 'Policing' water use within the home seemed to fall to the bill payer a lot of the time, who mainly saw efficiency through the lens of cost.
- The value of water in our society remains a barrier for behavioural change. Despite most participants saying water is a precious resource and woven into the touchpoints of their everyday lives, water remains a 'low salience' area for consumers in the context of what they think about day-to-day. Some examples include:

The YIP pre-task exercise asking students to keep a water usage diary opened their eyes to how much water is used every day for food preparation, cooking and washing up. Prior to this, students had not given their water usage much thought or consideration.

- The participants in the Explain research had broad agreement on water's importance and value, but admitted the availability of water as a resource can be taken for granted. This led to a tension in the research early on in the discussions because water can be viewed as an 'endless supply', so the idea of needing to save water, or be more efficient with water in their lives, was not always immediately salient. As a result, all said they used more water than they felt they 'should do' - from cleaning to cooking to bathing.
- Some participants said they had adopted some water saving habits (e.g. recycling water for watering plants) and we observe, when prompted, e.g. through taking part in a research study or a behavioural change campaign, a shift among some towards using less water for certain activities. However, on-going research and more accurate measurement of

water use (deploying the latest metering technology is needed to determine whether any ‘good practice’ water saving behaviours adopted can be maintained over time.

When thinking about their relationship with their water company, participants described a somewhat transactional relationship, which continues the theme from PR19 / PR24 research. In the Explain research, except among those recruited via Cambridge Central Mosque (who had been privy to Cambridge Water actively deepening their relationship with the Mosque recently) people had not previously considered that their water company ‘cared about’ water efficiency. This highlights another barrier for water companies to overcome, to showcase evidence to consumers that the environment is important in their plans.

Interestingly, whilst the environment is an area people care deeply about, the YIP continues to challenge the assumption that young people care disproportionately more about the environment than older generations, with students telling us that their environmental views rarely impacted how they live day-to-day.

The riots and demonstrations in certain geographical areas over the summer of 2024 were not picked up in the research studies as influencers of participants’ views, but did have had an influence on the effectiveness and reach of the Wudu campaign engagement. The main impact was that less people attended the Mosque and Cambridge Central Mosque paused promoting our campaign, rightly focusing efforts more on the welfare and safety of the community by working closely with the local police over several weeks.

Whilst not a major theme, there were a small number of participants in both the YIP and Explain research that raised issues around water company performance (e.g. leakage) and that these had damaged their trust and made them question whether it was appropriate for a water company to ask people to save water when so much was being wasted.

1.4.2 Cultural and religious motivations for water use and conservation

The extensive academic desk research carried out by the team at University of Cambridge suggests that religious ways of being, and sacred knowledges might offer ways ‘to think water otherwise’. There were nuanced and highly varied ideas about meanings of, and relations with, water. Notably, within and across Cambridge Muslim and Jewish communities there was great diversity in the ways individuals understood and engaged with water.

From the research conversations, University of Cambridge study identified **14 themes** that appeared most frequently in conversations and / or were highlighted by participants as the most important, or relevant topics. These are listed below and more details on each of these themes can be found in the [final report](#):

- Water in ritual
- The powers of water
- Water mandates
- Water and / in text
- Festival waters
- Inspired and inspiring ecologies
- Food and cooking
- Institutional procedures
- Understanding water
- Trust, scepticism, and suspicion
- Seeing is believing
- What is religious?
- Unexpected (dis)connections
- Language matters

Whilst in every category listed above there was great diversity of meanings and relations, several cross-cutting points became visible beyond these topics. It is important to remember that these findings are drawn from more engaged stakeholders, such as community faith leaders:

- People are aware that there are pressing water-related problems, including pollution, shortage, lack of care, and drought.
- People agree that there should be greater care for water and water sources, and many are already involved in initiatives and / or practices that aim at greater care, from small-scale actions at home to supporting environmental education within their communities to participation in wider water sustainability initiatives and organisations.
- People are sceptical of the motivations, actions, and outcomes of water company interventions, both in terms of their communities and for water more broadly.

In the Explain research, whilst cultural factors could be present, these were much less salient for people when set against the more pragmatic drivers to save water in their lives. For instance, older relatives and passed-down stories could influence opinions on water saving. Here, participants said they had heard stories about, or had seen water saving practices among their relatives, such as using a bucket for washing, instead of filling up a whole bath, or being very sparing with the water they use from the tap, never running it unnecessarily. This had given a strong impression to some of our participants that made them think more deeply about their use of water and how they could themselves be better at conserving it. This insight highlights that encouraging people from an early age to ingrain good water saving habits remains important.

The early discussions in the Explain research also showed that whilst religious beliefs can influence people's propensity to wish to save water, it is just one aspect that can influence people's behaviour. However, it is important to note that religious philosophy or teaching does not necessarily lead to saving water as part of religious practice. In some cases, it can lead to the opposite effect.

People from all the different religious backgrounds included in the Explain research, said they had a deep respect for water. However, despite similarities, distinctions relating to views of using and saving water across the religious groups consulted are important to draw out. We found that overall:

- **Sikh** participants emphasised how water is vital in their religious practice, and water efficiency a relevant concept to them. However, they more strongly associate larger volumes of water with religious spaces as opposed to religious practice – particularly the kitchen (langar) of the Gurdwara
- **Muslim** participants had a strong physical and spiritual connection with water. They were open to gaining more knowledge about saving water, and open to saving water in their lives to improve their religious observance
- **Hindu** participants consulted agreed that water is essential in their religious practice, but they do see themselves as already caring a lot about the environment and so would want this knowledge to be respected by any messaging undertaken by a water company.

These learnings have implications for any customer engagement and water efficiency campaigns – both in terms of people's appetite for communication that relates to water efficiency in their specific religious context, as well as steers on what people want from the specific content and tone.

For those who spoke about having absorbed religious teachings about the importance of respecting and saving water, or cultural traditions from their upbringing, this could encourage water saving practices in their life. Importantly, the relationship between water use, religion and traditions from upbringing is complex, and people's relationship with water and how it relates to religious views is highly nuanced and individualised. This highlights that a one-size fits all approach to encourage water use behaviour change is unlikely to be effective.

During discussions in the Explain research, there was a sense that people associated 'water efficiency' with being more aware about, and mindful of, the amount of water they are using, and then taking appropriate actions to avoid wasting it.

1.4.3 Barriers to water-saving behaviours

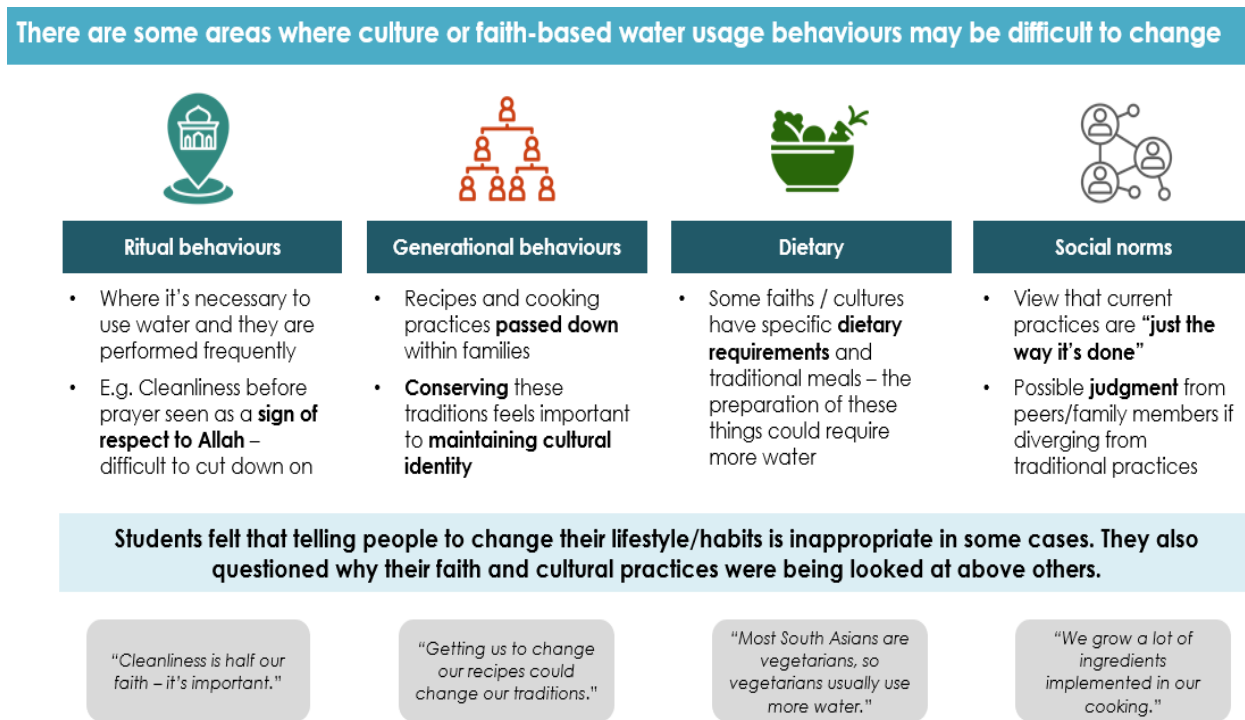
The Explain research highlighted that water wastage is often habitual (e.g. running taps, excessive cleaning, overuse during cooking). Some religious and cultural practices involve high water usage, making reduction efforts complex without clear guidance. Mistrust of water companies as credible sources of information was observed, highlighting the need for community-led messaging.

Individuals who attempted to advocate for water conservation within religious settings faced resistance, especially from older generations. There is a need for structured support to help community advocates deliver impactful messages.

When listening to the views of future customers, the YIP students highlighted the link between certain cultures and faiths and valuing water; whilst it's not something they had actively considered before, their feedback was that there is potential to embrace this link and tailor messaging around water saving around cultural / religious values.

The engagement with the YIP students also highlighted a range of potential barriers when engaging with diverse communities about water use – these are summarised in figure 2. Whilst these are the views of a relatively small group of sub-set of this generation, it highlights the importance for water companies to understand these types of barriers. The insight can then help ensure that any communications and water efficiency interventions that are employed, will not alienate these communities from being involved with changing their everyday water behaviours.

Figure 2 Young Innovators’ Panel findings – barriers to behaviour change when considering cultural practices



1.4.4 Engagement preferences and community-led approaches

The findings from the two community campaigns run, found that community-driven outreach (e.g. events, pop-ups, faith-based discussions) is preferred over corporate messaging. Personalised messaging, particularly when linked to water bills or household consumption data, was found to be more effective.

In the Explain research ‘water efficiency’ was perceived as **‘being more effective’** with the ways that people use or save water. During discussions, there was a sense that people associated ‘water efficiency’ with being more aware about, and mindful of, the amount of water they are using, and then taking appropriate actions to avoid wasting it. Positive messaging in this area is likely to prove more effective.

Overall, the notion that water-saving ‘benefits everyone’ (e.g. customers’ pockets and the environment) was an appealing and a motivating idea generated through the group discussions. Though it was felt more could be done to talk about the ‘moral responsibility’ and ethical practices of their water company regarding their role to save water, which they felt was lacking in their current knowledge and understanding.

However, there is evidence that water companies need to tread carefully, especially when considering the communications associated with behaviour change campaigns. For example, when the rice washing cooking campaign was discussed in the Explain research, participants cautioned strongly about the use of stereotypical or reductive imagery in relation to assumptions about the way they cook food. This highlights the need to carefully select any images used in campaigns.

The University of Cambridge study also highlights the need to overcome trust barriers. It found that many stakeholders were sceptical of the water companies’ motives. They questioned why a water company would want to know about their religious lives, why they should be singled out as a religious group, and why their other good deeds did not ‘count’. Others felt that the water companies were trying to place the blame on individuals, without taking responsibility for structural and infrastructural problems.

The learnings from the Wudu campaign in our Cambridge region evidenced that, in practice, it is better for the messaging around changing water use behaviours during ablution, to come from respected faith leaders (e.g. the Imam at Cambridge Central Mosque) – with the water company playing a supporting role.

Careful management of communication is essential to ensure the message is well-received and does not unintentionally alienate certain communities.

1.4.5 Engaging with customers about water efficiency through the lens of religion

The Explain research provided key learning about the need to understand the different communities to ensure positive outcomes when engaging with them around water efficiency and behavioural change. The learnings below provide insights to help with the future development of campaigns and communications messaging among diverse communities.

Muslim communities

- Water use and efficiency was viewed as a highly relevant topic among Muslims, across the sample participants said they are receptive to messages about this. People were open to their water company aligning with beliefs they already held that saving water is a good idea. This is due to the fact that: (a) there is a strong link between religious rituals and water use; and (b) an admission from many that ablution can be one of their main uses for water, there was a logical fit between religious observance and water efficiency.
- Perhaps, due to a disposition to learn about water saving as part of Islam, several participants taking part in the ethnographic research spontaneously took an experimental approach to participation in the digital ethnography. They did this by engaging in ‘trial and error’ to see if they could save more water during their time in the research. Such examples demonstrate potential scope to take this experimental mindset and utilise it in communications.
- Participants were keen for ‘softer’ and positively positioned advice that seeks to provide ‘**hints and tips**’ to use less water as part of a general desire for Muslims to embrace water efficiency within their lives, rather than communications that solely puts the spotlight on ‘excessive’ water use during ablutions and inadvertently causes offence, or make it feel like they are being targeted.

Sikh communities

- Messages distributed to the Sikh community about water efficiency may benefit from a community focus. Participants told us how giving back to the community is an integral part of being Sikh. As a result, community focussed messages about how to be more efficient with water may work well. For instance, saving water as an activity that allows ‘communal good’.
- There was some debate in the groups about whether it would be appropriate for a water company to talk about water saving measures within the Gurdwara, but the consensus was that this would be acceptable if dealt with sensitively and respectfully. Given the volume of water used to prepare and cook and clean up meals at community locations there is an opportunity for water companies to provide support and interventions to help Gurdwaras use less water.

Hindu communities

- Hindu participants welcomed messages on water efficiency but weren’t sure this needed to be delivered solely through a religious lens. Hindu participants also respected water within their religion – as part of this religion’s philosophy about saving water and being mindful about that as part of saving nature. Indeed, mindfulness as a concept is certainly something they are well versed in as part of their religious philosophy.
- Looking deeper, there was a sense that although the respect of water is central in their religion, the specific ‘overuse’ of water related to specific religious practices wasn’t salient to them. It felt like this was down to the volumes being used by them for religious practice, which was not thought to be a lot. As a result, some mentioned they would prefer messages to focus on the everyday use efficiencies that they can make – irrespective of their use of water as a practising Hindu – such as unlearning bad habits and being more mindful about saving water from a general household use perspective.
- In terms of trusted sources, messages that come from elders and parents were motivating for those consulted in this research. Those that were parents themselves spoke about wanting to pass down relevant Hindu teachings to their children.

1.4.6 Best practice learnings for water companies to be aware of

Based on the research findings, the University of Cambridge study offers four main recommendations which are particularly relevant for water companies.

1. **Learn.** When seeking to engage communities characterised by ‘religion’ or ‘faith’, water companies have a responsibility to consider and enhance their own religious literacy.
2. **Be reflexive.** Further reflection about who or what is ‘religious’ and / or ‘cultural’ and the work these terms do in industry discourse is needed to avoid othering and marginalising so-called ‘faith and diverse’ water users.
3. **Avoid generalising.** It is important that water companies are aware of and account for diversity within religious communities, if the aim is to produce and implement meaningful sustainability initiatives.

4. **Listen.** Listening is crucial. Water companies should aim to listen to, take seriously, and learn from water consumers, rather than telling ‘them’ where ‘they’ are failing and what ‘they’ must do.

The YIP students and the participants from the Explain research echoed the key findings from the University of Cambridge study, particularly the point around ‘learning’ and ‘listening’ to the communities being engaged. When considering the best ways to engage diverse communities, some consistent insights emerged across all the research undertaken:

- In order to be respectful and inclusive when focusing on specific culture or faith-based behaviours, it is important not to point the finger and simply highlight what is ‘bad’. Lead with best practice behaviours, supported by motivation / incentives and reasoning to avoid disengagement.
- Most people do not know which behaviours to adopt to save water: it is important to provide examples and dispel misconceptions, as well as to communicate the benefits and consequences of changing / not changing behaviours.
- Address people as individuals, rather than solely through their minority status. There is a risk of making cultural groups feel alienated and encouraging questions around focusing on specific groups if communications are too direct.
- In particular, the YIP students did not feel well informed about water scarcity and how their actions can impact it by the curriculum / faith school teaching as it stands. Most do not have much of an idea about how to save water beyond turning off running taps.
- When engaging young people, a combination of assemblies and class activities was felt to be the best approach. Younger people can also be engaged through social media, and making behaviour change into a game / competition, with tools such as shower timers is also felt to be especially effective for this age group.
- The potential need for water companies to support faith school teaching to highlight the challenges around long-term water supply and what role they as water consumers can play in helping to meet these challenges, is also evident.

Insights that can be used to inform campaigns for any community include understanding that **knowing what to do** is the biggest challenge consumers face. When it comes to water saving, most **struggle to think of what they can do** beyond turning the taps off when not in use. It is also **difficult for people to compare water usage across behaviours** – gauging water volume is difficult for daily activities. To help overcome these barriers, water companies should remember to:

- Send communications that focus on dispelling misconceptions in short, sharp bursts / quick facts, e.g. Barcelona rainfall example stuck with many YIP students.
- Give clear instructions on how to save water, with specific examples; explain how to perform them and why they are effective.
- Where there is potential, outline additional benefits beyond water saving to engage consumers, such as compost made from food waste (which is also water waste) can improve results in the garden and water from washing rice makes an effective hair mask.

The Explain research further highlighted revealed ‘risks’ around engagement – in potentially offending, singling out, or othering through communication. There are ways to avoid these pitfalls when talking to customers about water use in religious or cultural contexts. This may involve:

- Recognising people from the religious groups consulted can already be experts in the notion of saving water and care about this in their lives already.
- Understanding that the link between water efficiency and religion is not something most have really considered before in this much depth and so can be quite jarring if not positioned carefully.
- Ensuring communication that focuses on ‘traditional practices’ treads carefully, as some of these traditional uses and behaviours, such as traditional cooking practices, belong to older generations, or the past.
- Being positive in saving water, versus focusing on wastage.
- Avoiding any communications where it can be interpreted as though the water company is apportioning ‘blame’ to a specific religion for being more wasteful of water than others.

YIP students identified two key audiences to focus on when changing cooking practice behaviours; young people and mothers.

- Educating from a young age will help encourage best practice water behaviours, before wasteful behaviours become habits. Using the younger generation to help to change ingrained behaviours of older generations was felt to be an avenue water companies should explore.
- Mothers in many cultures have a strong influence in the kitchen and are key to passing on good behaviours to the rest of the family. However, many of these are water intensive; cooking water-based meals like curries or soups, washing rice or meat, soaking lentils. etc. and so all use a lot of water. When traditional methods of cooking are passed down through

generations there is a reluctance to change, so any campaigns need to be sensitive to this key point. The YIP students suggested creating YouTube vlogs aimed at 'Desi mums' specifically to encourage them to save water when cooking recipes.

Given that it is challenging to change ingrained behaviours, it is important that **communication focus on the motivation behind the behaviour**. Companies should also identify appropriate places for appropriate behaviours and demonstrate the 'best practice' alternative **by offering practical solutions**. For example, a simple water saving tip in a cooking recipe. **Limiting food waste** (which is also water waste) and making traditional recipes more water efficient were called out as areas to focus on.

The level of knowledge about water scarcity in Cambridge and the UK (and the risk of future shortages) was low among the YIP students. But students felt that people tend to react badly if they are 'told what to do' to resolve the challenge of shortages. A combination of explaining the benefits of behaviour change and the consequences of not doing so was felt to be the ideal approach. Benefits mentioned by students included financial incentives, but also **spiritual rewards**, which should be explored further to assess if this can help encourage positive water behaviours around spiritual rituals.

The University of Cambridge study also highlights the importance of **collaboration**. Water sustainability initiatives should be first and foremost collaborative, with those who are most immediately impacted by water interests and issues being at the centre of the design process. This was a key focus in the Wudu campaign undertaken in our Cambridge region

The study also offers two recommendations for those with expertise in the domains of religion and education, or who have the possibility to advance research and engagement (including through the allocation of research funding):

- **Contribute:** Consider the possibilities and opportunities to design and implement industry-appropriate religious literacy training.
- **Continue:** This report has identified further opportunities for meaningful research around the intersection of religious communities and water use. These include:
 - Studying how other religious communities use and relate to water and sustainability;
 - Exploring (dis)connections between knowledge and action, where there is insight to be gained from disciplines such as behavioural psychology; and
 - Co-designing and implementing sustainability projects with community actors. Support for researchers and communities is much needed to enable this work to happen.

Following all the recommendations in the University of Cambridge study has the potential to support meaningful relations with water and strengthen water sustainability initiatives. Executed well, it may also help to resolve the existing lack of trust in water industry actors that has arisen as a result of factors including the prevalence of water-related crises in the news, the private monopoly nature of water companies, and the tendency to construe a 'problem' in terms of communities that are 'harder to engage'.

From the Explain research discussions highlighted peoples' views about this complex notion of how, if at all, religion / cultural practice can be used as a way to communicate with them about saving water in their lives. Despite an obvious link between the two for some, others were not sure about the strength of the relationship between their religious observance and water over-use. Future engagement with customers seems to therefore have the option of either:

- **communicating with people about the religious use of water** and how they can save water when carrying out specific religious activities; and / or
- **speaking more diffusely to people with primed religious beliefs** about saving water in their lives, not referencing specific religious practices.

The former leans towards a focus on groups that use volumes of water ritualistically on a very regular basis (i.e. for ablution), or that use volumes of water in religious places (e.g. in the Gurdwara). The latter is a more universal approach that seeks to recognise that people from all religious and cultural backgrounds in the UK can share common beliefs about water as a precious resource.

Irrespective of religious or cultural background, participants talked a lot about the need for **universal 'hints and tips'** from their water company in terms of how small changes can over time lead to bigger positive changes in water consumption, benefiting both them and the environment.

Ideas that have been put forward include the promotion of 'hints and tips' on water saving, suggesting small changes to behaviour such as the multi-purposing of water at home and the benefits of this. Also, providing water saving devices and / or advice to people that wish to experiment to save water in their lives / religious practice and creating motivating lines of communication that may to

help those advocate for water saving in their community or among family generationally. Then there are community education programmes such as those in schools, and engagement with individuals but also places of worship.

These insights highlight the need to start with **small, manageable changes centred around one daily water use activity** and then, once fully ingrained into daily routines, to nudge consumers to consider other changes they could make. A snowball effect can take place.

Finally, irrespective of religious background, there were some common threads that emerged from across the research that may help when devising a communications strategy. These are common to other research studies carried out by water companies over recent years, and are summarised below:

- Across the groups there was a broad appeal in the idea of community engagement. For instance, events / pop ups were viewed as an appealing device. Outreach via face-to-face communications was felt to be an authentic way in which to develop trust and relations within the faith groups about the motivation for the water company's engagement. Though there was a strong mistrust with individual or 'door-to-door' engagement approaches and this was not desired.
- One or two said the gamification of reducing water in their area / community would be an appealing idea to them. For instance, engagement positioned as a 'game' whereby people can see others in their same area, and how much they are saving on water (perhaps through an app or portal). Through comparison with other's behaviour, they felt this peer-influence would provide motivation to then save more water in his life, too.
- Individualised information about saving water also came through as an interesting idea. For instance, people said that the only time they engage with their water company – when they look at their bill – was an ideal time to tell them about how to save water specifically related to their usage to spur them on. Helping people benchmark their water use was also felt to potentially be a useful device to get people thinking about their usage, specifically if this can allow people to get a quick read of how much they are using compared to the 'norm'.
- Coming through in the ethnographic work, there was a notion that the sink is a visceral space where water is seen to be wasted in the home, with many talking about contemplating how much water they are using when watching it all 'drain away'. This might have further application in communications work when thinking about motivating imagery or ideas to get people thinking about water wastage.
- Giving away water saving devices and / or providing 'hints and tips' for how people can save water during their common everyday uses / look for leaks, etc. came through as a popular idea for people across all the religious backgrounds.

A final important insight is that to be deliver sustained behavioural change, **on-going engagement** is needed with diverse communities. This includes the need to build local community partnerships and to ensure people are regularly engaged in a sensitive, yet impactful way around the need to develop and then maintain water efficient behaviours in their daily lives.

On-going communication and being honest and transparent about perceived service failures and how the company is investing to improve these is also important (particularly around leakage), to ensure that customers do not dis-engage from adopting water saving behaviours.

1.5 Wider learnings from the WEFDC research programme – practical advice

A key learning when carrying out research among diverse communities is the approach to recruitment of participants. We have outlined below some of the challenges faced in our research programme and outlined the recommendations that we have gathered from asking community stakeholders and those who took part in the research for their feedback.

- Recruitment for this year's YIP, which over the previous three years has been over-subscribed, proved more challenging. Complexity was added as students needed to have a connection to South Asian or Indian sub-continent cultures. As normal, we went out to schools directly through email and telephone conversations to promote the YIP to schools in the region, as well as engaging with local cultural / religious community organisations through flyer distribution. However, we did not achieve the original target of 15 registrations.
- A range of recommendations were suggested by the students who took part in the YIP and academic reviewers who reviewed the project outputs. These highlighted the consistent need for early up-front engagement with communities ahead of recruitment starting and the need to further widen promotional activity across multiple channels:
 - **Ensuring that leaflets are distributed to a wide range of centres of worship** (not just mosques). This could be achieved by building stronger relationships with named contacts at Sikh Gurdwaras, Hindu Temples and Buddhist centres of worship.

- **Disseminate flyers in high touchpoint locations**, such as youth centres, sports clubs, meditation and wellbeing centres, gyms, parks and walking tracks - this could be better achieved using an in-person recruiter, or a designated member of staff.
- **Engage further with University of Cambridge** – this could include sending out communications as early as possible, planning events around university termtime and engaging individual colleges.
- **Many attendees were made aware of the YIP through other students** – word of mouth is an effective channel to tap into from the start of the recruitment process.
- **Advertising opportunities through assemblies** - students recommend colleagues going into schools and colleges.
- **Widening promotion opportunity across more social media channels, e.g. Instagram and TikTok** – with a suitable video featuring people they can relate to which will increase interest with the YIP.
- Recruitment for the qualitative research run by Explain also proved more challenging. We engaged with Cambridge Central Mosque early to ask them to promote the research opportunity to their email database and also to hand-out flyers at the Mosque that we supplied. They also mentioned the opportunity after their Friday prayers through the Imam’s sermon or weekly announcements. We also developed contacts with local faith related, community based and educational organisations and asked them to promote the opportunity to their contacts. Over a period of four months, we had received less than a handful of sign-ups, we moved to on-street recruitment. This also proved ineffective. This led us to recruit most of the participants who took part in the research through commercial online panels. The experience was a similar one in the South Staffs region when we asked the Gurdwara in Smethwick to help promote the research. We are grateful to all the support we received from our community partners and the following learning are important to share:
 - None of the stakeholder organisations working in local communities were resistant to supporting the research recruitment, but fed back that because they receive so many requests from organisations for support with initiatives that they lacked the time to effectively support research recruitment activities. A much longer lead time is needed to gain a window for them to provide sufficient support. It is also vital that water companies provide all the collateral and communications materials to ensure it is quick and easy for them to promote opportunities to the communities they engage with.
 - Early engagement can help to identify the best opportunities to ask for support, such as outside religious holiday periods where there is less scope to support for requests, such as help with research recruitment.
 - Tapping more into educational organisations has the potential to be an effective recruitment channel, as most have faith-based societies or groups, they can share opportunities with. However, timing and long-lead times would be needed for recruitment, which is challenging within project timelines. Making it easy for the opportunity to spread by word of mouth is also important.
 - Commercial panels remain effective for recruitment, but this limits the opportunity to hold face-to-face sessions given those registered on panels are used to engaging online with companies. They are also more likely to be geographically spread, which makes finding a location more challenging. For the Explain research it meant we were unable to include those who cannot / will not engage with the research online.

Outside of recruitment process, the research programme received positive feedback from those who participated, with two main areas emerging for consideration moving forward. Whilst these were relatively isolated, they provide important points of consideration:

- A few comments were left, particularly from participants who joined the programme fresh in phase 3 of the Explain research and so were less informed than those who have taken part in early stages, about why the group discussions centred around religion and water efficiency. This made them feel like they were being targeted around water use behaviours based on their faith. Whilst this was managed by the independent facilitators, it highlights the need, when this situation occurs, to spend more time on-boarding those joining the research process as a study progresses to ensure they do not feel uncomfortable.
- Given the topic in question being emotive and complex, one participant flagged in the Explain research that moderators could have done more to stop dominant voices from preventing everyone from having their say. This is a common issue in group research and needs on-going consideration when managing – e.g. through the use of the ‘raise your hand’ feature or reminding customers of the ground rules for participating during the session as well as the start.

From our YIP students and academic reviewers, we had the following feedback for consideration:

- **Invest more time in activities that are engaging when learning about the company and water** - e.g. more games and quizzes. Also calls for more interactive, whole-group activities - e.g. competitions and more discussion facilitation within / between groups; mixing them more.
- **Knowing more about the plan / agenda beforehand** to help students prepare better for the sessions.
- **Incorporate a report-back mechanism** checking in with students to see if their usage behaviours / attitudes changed after participation – a post-task diary could allow direct comparisons with their previous behaviours.

- **Keep the focus on culture rather than faith when discussing cooking** related behaviours – as these are more related to ethnicities and geographical origin
- **Keep the focus on preparing, washing and cleaning practices, rather than the types of cuisine being prepared** – without additional research it is difficult to tell if one cuisine is more water efficient than another
- **Use ‘promoting best practices’ rather than ‘behaviour change strategy’**, which could imply that the cultures in question are more likely to waste water.

Another important learning is to ensure that water companies engage early with expert stakeholders and community leaders:

- They have the chance to input into the project objectives and scope to bring on the ground experience and community knowledge to improve outcomes. This engagement can highlight areas where there are opportunities and potential risks, such as intentionally using the wrong language that will turn off, or worse, offend the audience. For example, we found that switching from the word ‘pledge’ to ‘intention’ for signing up to the Wudu campaign landed better with Muslims. As the word pledge had the connotation of a promise, which as a Muslim have more pressure to fulfil and sinful if broken, whereas the word intention is a language commonly used in Islam before any action is taken and less pressure to act upon it. Another example was the poorly translated rice washing leaflet into Punjabi, which was corrected with the support from our partner, Eco Sikh.
- Identifying early on which stakeholders will support and get behind an engagement programme and which have the potential to cause issues and disruption is important. For example, during the Wudu campaign, we heard through community conversations that one influential community leader was telling their contacts that they should not engage with Cambridge Water. They were spreading messages that the engagement was just a way to enforce people to have water meters, which was untrue given the WEFDC project objectives and not a policy being pursued by Cambridge Water. Whilst we were not able to accurately directly determine the true level of disengagement and lost trust this might have caused, it highlights the risks that need to be considered and to prepare for these by having a clear plan in place to counter negative comments through using supportive community partnerships channels. It also highlights the need for early and proactive engagement and the need to consider the ‘value exchange’ in terms giving back to the community or highlighting the benefits that the engagement can bring.