

A Report Analysing, Applying, and Evaluating the Business Strategy implemented by Lidl



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report intends to identify the main concepts within Strategy, as well as the strategic positioning the organisation Lidl maintains, highlighting the benefits of using such strategies, as well as their individual and overall limitations.

Lidl was first founded in Neckarsulm, Germany in 1930 as an assorted food wholesaler, it wasn't until 1974 that Lidl started trading as the brand they are recognised today, continuing their expansion in Germany alone until 1988, where they had over 430 successful branches. In 1989 Lidl started their European expansion with their first store in France, finally opening their first store in the United Kingdom in 1994, Lidl continue with their international expansion having recently opened their first store in the United States in 2017.

Identifying and highlighting key concepts within strategy is crucial, strategy itself can be defined as the direction and scope of an organisation over a long time period, business level strategy can be looked at as the second level of strategy that follows the same concepts as the core level strategy but is made appropriate for each section of the business. Competitor advantage is what one organisation has to offer that another organisation cannot, this can successfully be achieved by effective strategic positioning. One method of effective strategic positioning is the use of Faulkner and Bowman (1995) strategy clock, the clock has eight strategic positions, the first two are cost focussed, the next three are differentiation focussed, and the final three are considered destined for failure as the cost of the product exceeds the value, the final three strategies arguably can not create a competitive advantage.

Lidl has implemented the 'no frills' strategic position, this means that they have kept their own costs low, by not engaging with new technology as quick as other conventional retailers, as well as not creating such a luxury feel within their stores. This in turn allows for Lidl to keep its prices low thus creating a competitor advantage. The main advantage of the 'no frills' strategy is that it creates a competitive advantage in relation to price, however a relative disadvantage is that if one organisation is able to implement this strategy then so can its competitors.

Finally, it is recommended that Lidl continue the use of their 'no frills' strategy as it has unarguably been effective, while they take into consideration the adaption of modern technology and its potential advantages to the organisation.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 REPORT REMIT

The remit of this report is to: Identify the strategy that the organisation Lidl has used, including examples of how Lidl have managed to accomplish this strategy, with attention as to how their utilisation of said strategy allows for their current competitive position. Continuing to evaluate the current competitive strategy, looking at both its advantages and limitations. Finally, appropriate recommendations must be made.

2.2 BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANISATION

Lidl De. (2019b) highlights that Lidl is a supermarket chain that offers a reliable, easy, and cost effective option to the supply of everyday items to its customers. First Lidl De. (2019b) allows for an initial understanding of its company, Lidl has been trading as the brand it is known as today for over 40 years, opening its first store in Germany in 1973. However, Lidl De. (2019a) highlights that it was originally founded as a food assortment wholesaler in Neckarsulm, Germany in 1930, with Lidl's international headquarters remaining in Neckarsulm today. By 1988 Lidl De. (2019) had very successfully expanded within Germany, operating over 450 branches, as well as employing more than 5,000 people. The following year in 1989 Lidl De. (2019) took its first step into the world of international trade, opening its first store in France, this is seemingly successful as by 2003 Lidl employ over 80,000 employees Europe wide. Lidl De. (2019) 14 years later in 2017 Lidl make a brave move and open its first store in the united states, View appendix a for a more detailed timeline of Lidl's expansion.

Lidl UK (2019a) highlights that the first store opened in Great Britain was opened in 1994, continuing that now 25 years later, Great Britain is now home to more than 760 stores which between them employ more than 22,000 people. Lidl GB (2019) highlights its mission statement to be as follows: 'To deliver outstanding customer satisfaction. To ensure market leading quality and value by constantly innovating and optimising our efficient processes, driven by technology and people. To work with business partners in sustainable relationships, contributing positively to local communities. To achieve long term success by investing in the recruitment, training and development of our people'. Both Lidl GB (2019), and Lidl de. (2019) demonstrated how Lidl is effectively achieving their mission, receiving the fair trade award in 2016 for their continued commitment to

sustainable development, as well as pledging to pay their employees more than their competitors, to create good working conditions regardless of what department they work within.

2.3 DEFINITIONS OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

Before looking at a strategic model to identify Lidl's strategy it is first important to clearly identify and define the key concepts relevant to this report, these concepts are: Strategy, Business level Strategy, and Competitor advantage.

Hooley, Nicoulaud and Piercy (2008) define the core strategy as a statement that identifies how a company will achieve their objective using basic strategy. Hooley, Nicoulaud and Piercy (2008) continue that the core strategy can only be established once the businesses available resources as well as the market they intent to operate within has been established and analysed, in relation to the overall business objective and mission. In simpler terms an organisations core strategy is what they want to do and how they are going to do it. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) highlight a key concept in core strategy, or corporate strategy to be the 'direction and scope' of an organisation over a long time period. Continuing that 'core' or 'corporate' level strategy is always the first level of strategy within an organisation.

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) states that the second level of strategy within a business is 'business level strategy' which is sometimes referred to as competitive strategy, as it is the strategy each business within a corporation will implement with the intention to 'out do' their competitors. Johnson Scholes and Whittington (2008) continue that businesses create the business level strategy with particular concern to Pricing, innovation, and differentiation, to allow for a competitor advantage.

Thompson and Martin (2010) state that competitor advantage is fundamentally what an organisation does better than their competitors, the organisation in questions ability to meet the needs of their customers better than their competitors can. Thompson and Martin (2010) continue that competitive advantage can be achieved by mastering at least one of the following three factors, cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. However, Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) are critical of this, arguing that it is hard to definitively

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understand what each factor means, continuing that in order to achieve competitor advantage these factors need to be broken down further, to avoid confusion between cost leadership, and low price for instance.

Faulkner and Bowman's (1995) strategy clock represents different positions within a market that business, and customers may be positioned in, this clock is a strategic method that allows for a competitor advantage when used correctly. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) identify the strategy clock's eight sections in order to be as follows: No Frills, Low Price, Hybrid, Differentiation, Focused Differentiation, Increased Price/Standard Value, Increased Price/Low Value, and finally, Low value for standard price. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) continues that the first two positions, no frills and low cost, meaning that as long as the product is wanted or needed by the customer it will be the price that inevitably convinces the customer to purchase, these items are usually necessities as opposed to luxury items. While (3,4, and 5,) Hybrid, Differentiation, and Focus Differentiation are all differentiation orientated, and these strategies are far more likely to be implemented within organisations dealing in niche or luxury products. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) continue that this is due to the focus being on the product or service itself, what sets it apart from the others is what is going to convince customers to purchase. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) argue that the final three positions of the strategy clock are likely to fail, mostly due to their inability to create a competitive advantage, with these positions being seemingly overpriced in comparison to their given values, below there is a visual representation of the strategy clock.

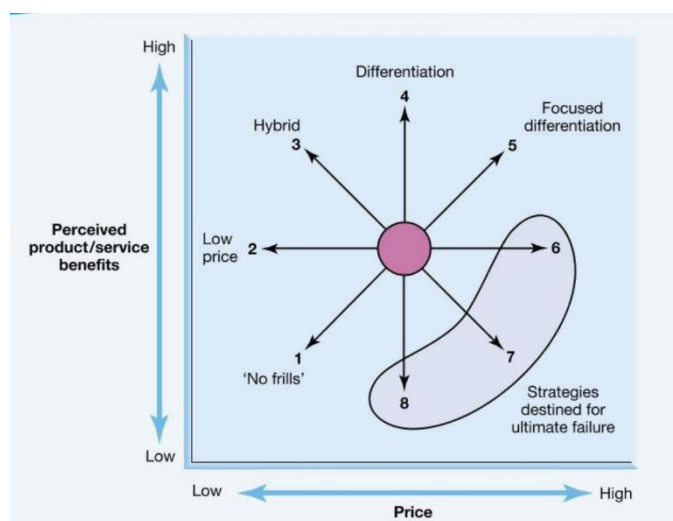


FIGURE 2-1 - Bowman and Faulkner's strategy clock (Johnson Scholes and Whittington, 2008)

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Drummond, Ensor and Ashford (2008) argue the importance of consistency, stating that an organisations core strategy must be integrated throughout all levels of strategy, this is equally true when deciding which position an organisation sits within the strategy clock. Faulkner and Bowman (1995) argue that competitive advantage will be achieved by consistently providing customers with what they want or need, that their want or need for a product will be driven by their value perception of a product. Faulkner and Bowman (1995) continue that each position on the strategy clock has its own distinct value, that it is possible to be successful by either offering value for money through pricing, and or differentiation.

One limitation of this strategy identified by Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) is the ability to be 'stuck in the middle' despite having more strategic positions than some of the other strategies available, every business is still different and not every organisation will fit perfectly into an available strategy

3. MAIN BODY

Using Faulkner and Bowman (1995) strategy clock it was evident that Lidl utilizes a 'no frills' strategy, that they offer a low priced product, they are able to offer this 'no frills' strategy by cutting their own costs in other places, such as the way products are displayed in store, as well as the number of staff on shift in store at once. However, it is important to remember that the 'no frills' strategy can sometimes give the perception of low-quality products. The below sections will identify in detail the implementation of Lidl's strategy, how it gives them a competitive advantage, as well as if and why it has been successful for them.

3.1 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

MarketLine's (2015) case study focusses on the 'big six' British retailers response to the threat of low cost no frills supermarket chains such as Lidl and Aldi, highlighting that since the economic crash in 2008 shoppers became and remained far more price sensitive than they once were. MarketLine (2015) continues that due to the stagnant wages, and lack of higher paying jobs, shoppers' habits have changed, brand loyalty has been lost and individuals are far more likely to shop around for a better deal.

It is arguable, that this lack of loyalty currently surrounding conventional retailers as well as no frills organisations could be one of the reasons Lidl was extremely late to implement a loyalty scheme, Hobbs (2016) highlights the recent introduction of 'my Lidl' which creates an online community for customers to engage with each other as well as gain 'rewards'. However, 'My Lidl is primitive in relation to Tesco's Clubcard and Sainsburys nectar points scheme. Roderick (2015) states Lidl's success, directly relating to their continued market growth in 2015, while conventional supermarkets remained in a 'slump', this was before Lidl even began to engage with online shopping and Loyalty schemes, while in 2015 the big four supermarkets were well in line with the rest of the worlds technological advancements, it was clear then that Lidl's lack of, creating a no frills shopping experience offered them no serious disadvantage, while allowing them to save on unnecessary costs and reduce product pricing. Lidl have successfully used their understanding of a lack of loyalty to their brand in their favour, with the use of the Lidl weekly (2019) that gets posted

through most doors, every week with advertisements for all of their products as well as their weekly specials.

Lidl's UK (2019) website when compared to that of Tesco's (2019) website who are not a 'no frills' company, Lidl's is inferior, Tesco not only have the shop online, home deliver, and click and collect functions, they also have a wide variety of customer engaging options. Tesco (2019) have also expanded to continuously selling, groceries, clothing, electronics, mobile phone contracts, photos, insurance, as well as having their own bank. Tesco's (2019) commitment to building a brand that helps their customers in all aspects of their life will have proven costly for the organisation. While Lidl's UK (2019a) website offers a limited set of options, including somewhat of an online catalogue of products and a recipe section. This will have saved Lidl money allowing them to keep their pricing low.

It is arguable that where it is most relevant that costs have been cut is inside the Lidl branches themselves, Rice (2019) highlights how discount supermarket chains like Lidl and their rival Aldi, scan the customers groceries so fast that it feels like they are being thrown down the checkout, with no option for assisted packing. Another strange phenomenon with of a 'no frills' supermarket like Lidl is the lack of effort that goes into the not so plush interior design, with most products being displayed in the cardboard boxes they were delivered in, or on pallets the aesthetic in Lidl does not scream luxury. However, all these experiences within the Lidl stores are examples of their 'no frills' strategy.

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) highlight how the 'price sensitive' market segment could be attractive to companies like Lidl, continuing that Lidl's use of a 'no frills' strategy has allowed for them to avoid conventional competitors like Tesco, as they are not directly competing for the same market segments. Lidl UK's attraction to the 'price sensitive' market segment is evident in how they place their stores, Lidl UK (2019b) shows that there is a direct link to the lower income areas in relation to Lidl's store placement, for example there are multiple surrounding both Neath, Port Talbot, as well as Morriston in the Swansea area, however not a single store in The Mumbles and the Gower. This can then be compared with the DWP's (2019) report of unemployment statistics within the Swansea county, unemployed households are likely to have less disposable income, Lidl

have not only made themselves an affordable choice but a convenient one for their price sensitive target market. View appendix B and C for further information.

3.2 ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF THE STRATEGY

Whites (2004) argues that there are only two factors that will give an organisation a competitive advantage, these two factors are differentiation and low cost, continuing that an organisation must incorporate one of these into their strategy or they will not be able to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage. Huggins (2011) identifies the advantage of having a strategy in place, stating that it allows to build a structured business orientation, allowing for the main business focus to be followed and achieved. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) add that the cost saving strategy allows for conventional competitors to be avoided as the same 'price sensitive' marketplace is not being fought for.

Jeffs (2008) argues that one significant disadvantage to the 'no frills' strategy is that it can be difficult to maintain, while it is beneficial in giving new entrants to a market place a competitive advantage, as the demands of said marketplace adapt and change due to external factors such as environment and technology it can become difficult for organisations to keep their price lower than that of their competitors, while still meeting the customer's needs. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) highlights another disadvantage of this method to be, the high customer control, if customers want or expect a lower price then a 'no frills' business would almost have to meet the demand. The final disadvantage identified by Johnson Scholes and Whittington (2008) is that in terms of 'no frills' strategies price being the main incentive to buy, if an organisation like Lidl can use the strategy then so can their competitors.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Lidl is a low-cost, no frills retailer that has been in existence since the 1930's and operating as it is known today since the 1970's, with its introduction to the UK in the early 1990's. After looking at core strategy and then business strategy, in relation to competitor advantage, it was deemed essential to find a strategy model that could be applied to Lidl, the strategy clock was used. After the evaluation of each of the eight positions on the strategy clock, which fall into three main sections: Cost, Differentiation, and destined to failure. The strategy that Lidl currently implement was deemed to be the 'no frills' strategy. Lidl has effectively implemented this strategy across all aspects of their business since the word go, allowing for the organisation to keep costs low, pay employees fairly, and dominate their marketplace all in conjunction with each other. Despite one of the main the Limitations of the 'no frills' strategy being the difficulty to maintain it, Lidl have evidently done a tremendous job to date, however new technological advancements, and economical environment have the potential to threaten their current strategy. Due to the limitations of this report not all positions of the strategy clock could be looked at in depth, for further research it would be advised that the strategy clock is looked at in more depth allowing for a greater understanding of both the advantages and limitations of each strategic position.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The first recommendation made by this report will be that Lidl as an organisation, maintain their current strategy of 'no frills', their on going expansion and development as an international organisation is enough proof that the 'no frills' strategy works for them, however it is important that Lidl do not fall behind the rest of the market place as the world adapts and changes.

The second recommendation this report will make is to investigate the advancements in technology that may prove helpful to Lidl, a good starting point would be that of

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improvement of their current loyalty scheme, with the introduction of better rewards system, potentially similar to that of Tesco's Clubcard. It is crucial that while Lidl continue to develop and expand that they remain careful not to cross over into a hybrid strategy, there is evidence of potential for this to happen, mostly due to the advancements in technology, if Lidl move too quickly to catch up with competitors in relation to technological advancements it could jeopardise their successful 'no frills' strategy.

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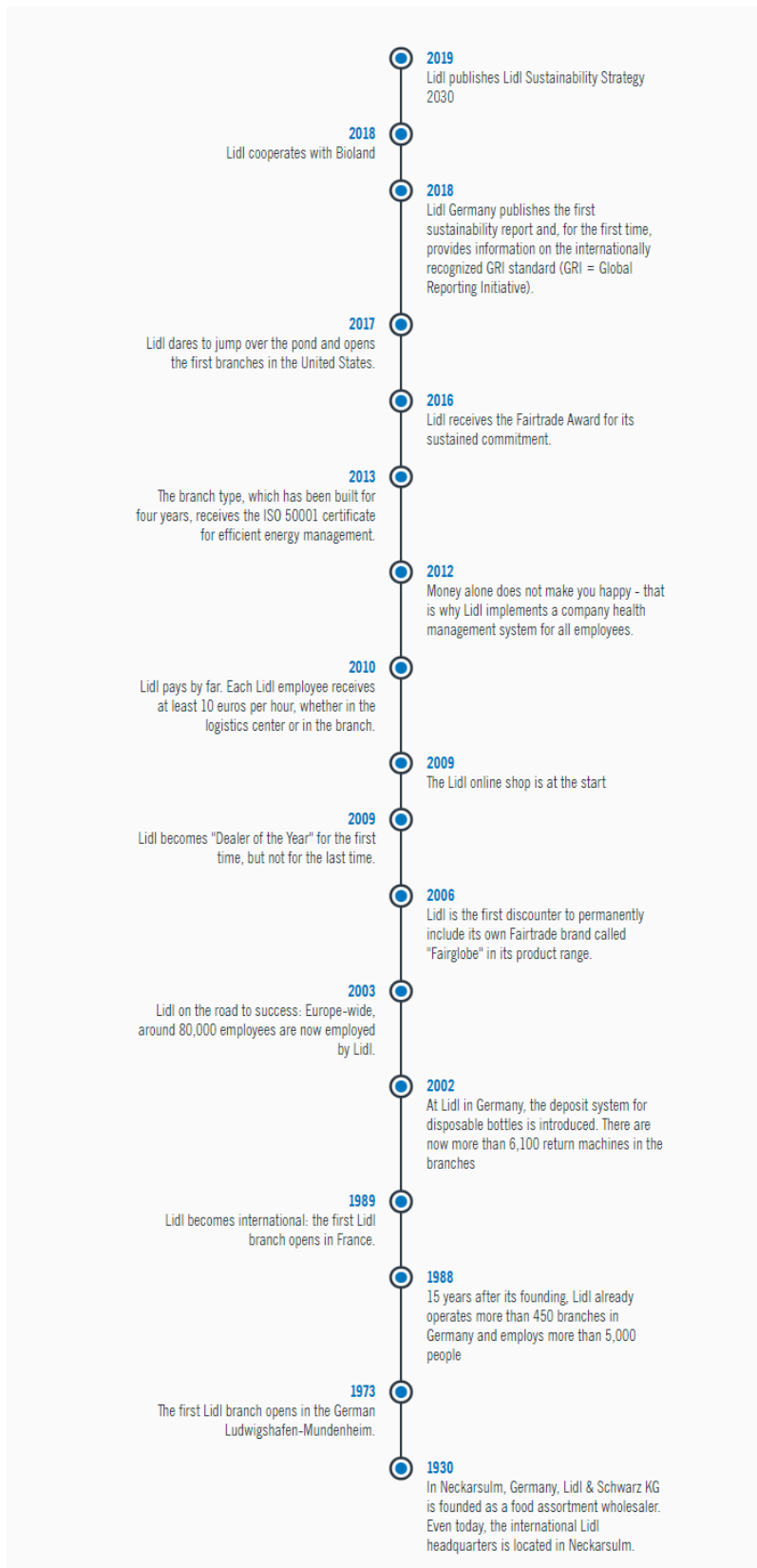
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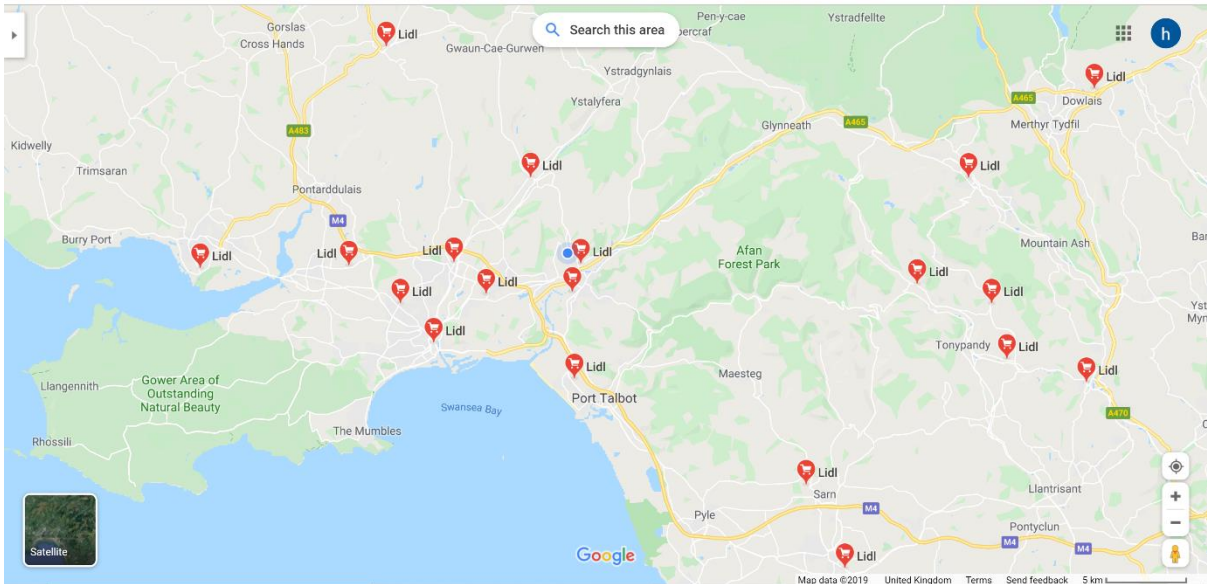
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6. APPENDICES

Appendix A



Appendix B



Appendix C

National unemployment statistics: December 2018 to February 2019

Unemployment (LF-S)	People	Rate %	Change on quarter	Change on year
WALES				
Men	38,000	4.7	+1,000 +12.4%	+1,000 +2.8%
Women	32,000	4.2	+2,000 +7.2%	-1,000 -2.0%
People	71,000	4.5	+6,000 +10.0%	+0 +0.6%
UK				
Men	731,000	4.1	-7,000 -1.0%	-18,000 -2.4%
Women	611,000	3.8	20,000 3.1%	59,000 8.8%
People	1,343,000	3.9	-27,000 -2.0%	-76,000 -5.4%

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), ONS. From 'Labour market statistics' UKWales releases, 15 April 2019.

Notes: Data is seasonally adjusted. Levels and rates are for those aged 16 and over. The rate is expressed as a proportion of all economically active people. The LFS figure uses the ILO definition of unemployment where people are without a job, have actively sought work in the last four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks, or are out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start it in the next two weeks.

Labour Market Statistics Update – April 2019 | Information, Research & GDS, Swansea Council

1

Claimant count by Ward in Swansea: 14 March 2019 (ranked by People Rate %)

Electoral Ward	Men	Rate %	Women	Rate %	People	Rate %	Change on year
Townhill	265	10.7	175	5.9	440	8.1	+105 (+31%)
Penderry	345	9.6	250	6.5	595	8.0	+140 (+31%)
Castle	615	7.6	215	4.1	830	6.2	+230 (+38%)
Landore	165	7.2	80	3.5	245	5.3	+45 (+23%)
Bonymaen	110	4.9	80	3.8	200	4.4	+50 (+33%)
St. Thomas	125	4.4	85	3.4	215	3.9	+85 (+43%)
Mynddibach	130	4.9	75	2.8	205	3.8	+40 (+24%)
Lower Loughor	35	4.8	20	2.8	55	3.8	+15 (+38%)
Cockett	205	4.6	135	2.9	335	3.7	+120 (+56%)
Morriston	210	4.1	160	3.0	370	3.6	+75 (+25%)
Cwmberia	110	4.3	75	2.9	180	3.6	+55 (+44%)
Clydach	95	4.2	70	2.9	160	3.6	+30 (+23%)
Gorseinon	55	3.6	40	2.6	90	3.1	+30 (+50%)
West Cross	55	3.1	45	2.4	100	2.8	+30 (+43%)
Llansamlet	135	2.9	110	2.2	245	2.6	+55 (+29%)
Pontarddulais	60	2.9	45	2.3	105	2.6	+20 (+24%)
Penyrheol	50	3.0	35	1.9	85	2.4	+20 (+31%)
Upper Loughor	25	3.2	15	1.6	40	2.4	+20 (+100%)
Uplands	190	2.5	80	1.1	265	2.0	+65 (+34%)
Gowerton	40	2.6	25	1.5	65	2.0	+15 (+30%)
Sketty	105	2.3	60	1.4	165	1.9	+50 (+43%)
Penclawdd	25	2.5	15	1.3	40	1.9	+10 (+33%)
Bishopston	20	2.4	10	1.4	30	1.9	+15 (+100%)
Penllergaer	20	1.9	15	1.6	35	1.8	+0 (+0%)
Kingsbridge	20	1.8	15	1.3	40	1.6	+10 (+33%)
Mawr	10	1.9	5	1.3	20	1.6	+15 (+300%)
Oystermouth	15	1.4	20	1.6	35	1.5	+5 (+17%)
Dunvant	20	1.7	15	1.0	35	1.3	+5 (+17%)
Fairwood	10	1.5	5	0.7	20	1.1	+0 (+0%)
Pennard	10	1.4	5	0.7	15	1.1	+5 (+50%)
Llangyfelach	20	1.2	10	0.7	30	0.9	+10 (+50%)
Gower	10	1.2	5	0.7	20	0.9	+10 (+100%)
Newton	10	1.3	5	0.5	15	0.9	+5 (+50%)
Killay South	5	1.1	5	0.5	10	0.8	-5 (-33%)
Mayals	5	0.9	5	0.6	10	0.8	+5 (+100%)
Killay North	5	0.4	0	#	5	0.3	-5 (-50%)
Total (Swansea)	3,340	4.2	2,005	2.6	5,345	3.4	+1,355 (+34%)

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative systems, ONS / Nomis, 15 April 2019.

Notes:

- The claimant rates are ONS' published estimates calculated using the resident working age population aged 16-64 by electoral ward.
- In this table, wards are ranked in order of claimant unemployment rate (all people), high to low.
- Claimant count data is published rounded to the nearest 5, and any # values shown are those suppressed by ONS.
- Local area claimant data is also available on the basis of ONS' Super Output Area (SOA) geography, e.g. by LSOA (lower layer SOA).