

BRIEFING

WHAT CLIMATE ACTION DOES THE PUBLIC WANT FROM BUSINESS?

In September 2021, Business in the Community (BITC) commissioned YouGov to help us understand perceptions and priorities around climate action from business. The headlines in this briefing clearly demonstrate the need for businesses to take rapid climate action. It also shows a need to think critically about *how* they act to ensure the transition to a resilient, net zero UK is fair and enables people and nature to thrive.

Introduction

Our research shows that:

- 76% of the public are not aware of what businesses are doing to tackle the climate crisis, and of those that do, 62% do not trust them to follow through.
- Only 14% of the public think that negative consequences of the net zero transition will be shared equally.
- Very few people expect their jobs to change as a result of climate change, and of those that do, 57% do not think their employer is preparing them with the right skills.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Awareness and attitudes

Almost all respondents knew something about climate change, and many are concerned by what this means for them and their community. However, while most people know something, only a small proportion (10%) know a great deal. The figure is slightly more among younger people. The two biggest worries for the public are extreme weather events (85% rated this as one of their concerns) and biodiversity loss (79%).

Steps one, two, and three of BITC's [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#) address these concerns, setting out how businesses should invest in projects and programmes that restore nature in order to repair the climate. These solutions would help to address biodiversity loss and ultimately help to lower the risk of extreme weather events by providing natural defences against fire and floods and tackling global emissions.

Tackling the climate crisis will require changes across all spheres of society, and everyone will have their part to play. It also means some difficult choices have to be made and, ultimately, there will be a financial cost behind some of these changes.

Our survey shows that most people (71%) think national governments have the primary responsibility for tackling the crisis. However, younger respondents are much more likely to see businesses as primarily responsible.

It is clear that people expect businesses to act. However, right now, people either don't know what their employer is doing to tackle the climate crisis (43%), or don't think they are doing enough (27%). This figure rises when people are responding as



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customers, with 76% of people not aware of what the businesses they give custom to are doing.

In addition, most people don't believe that business will follow through on the commitments they make (62%). It is therefore vital for businesses to step up their response to the climate crisis and communicate more effectively to meet the expectations of employees and customers.

When asked about how well various actors had engaged with the public on climate change, the overwhelming response was 'poorly'. Other than environmental charities, all actors were rated by a majority of people as engaging poorly, with businesses ranked last in terms of their engagement.

15%

of people think that businesses have engaged the public well on climate change.

The poor performance of business in public perception demonstrates that businesses must do better to engage with the public on the climate crisis and the actions they're taking. Our [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#) include transparent reporting and engaging with diverse stakeholders to begin to build public confidence in business.

Work and skills

Most people do not believe their jobs will be affected by climate change, and those that do think that their employer is not doing enough to prepare them for the changes.

12%

of people think their job will be adversely affected by climate change

Those that do are more likely to be in carbon-intensive industries, such as transport. Of those that do recognise that their job will require new skills, the majority do not believe their employer is doing enough to prepare them for this.

57%

of people who think their job will change do not think their employer is preparing them.

There is clearly a need for businesses to step up and engage their workforce on the skills required to transition to achieve a resilient, net zero emissions world. More information and case studies can be found in our [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#).

A just transition

Our research wanted to understand public priorities for a 'just transition', but also to gauge awareness of the term itself. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the term was not widely recognised by the public, although it was more familiar to younger respondents.

Despite the 'just transition' being unfamiliar to a majority of the public, issues of fairness and responsibility for tackling the climate crisis were not, and this is likely how most customers and employees will relate.

14%

of people think the negative effects of the transition will be shared equally.

These numbers show that businesses need to engage with the public around climate action as the public does not believe it will be conducted in a fair way. This is why businesses should use Step 5 of our '[Seven Steps for Climate Action](#)' guidance to involve diverse stakeholders and support communities.

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WHAT'S NEXT?

This briefing sets out the headline results of our research. BITC will publish a full analysis of the results in January 2022, which will dig deeper into regional and demographic trends. This will demonstrate priorities for all UK businesses, and across all regions of the country, and will be used to create collaborative action projects that will help to deliver a fair and just transition.

In the meantime, our [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#) is now live which sets out practical guidance and examples of how business can get serious, not only about tackling the climate crisis, but about rebuilding trust with the public on this issue and making sure that the transition is fair and equitable for all.

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH

Two nationally representative surveys were commissioned with YouGov in Autumn 2021 with the aim of assessing the perceptions and priorities of the general public and business when it comes to corporate climate action. Our aim was to get a better understanding of:

- Public attitudes and awareness to the climate crisis and business action to address it.
- Actions the public has taken to reduce their carbon footprint and the barriers they face.
- Perceptions of fairness, change, and preparedness.
- Priorities for the public for a fair and just transition to a resilient, net zero UK.

These headline findings highlight key trends for responsible businesses. Crucially, they confirm that how we act is just as important as what we do. This is why BITC has produced its [Seven Steps for Business Climate Action](#) to help inspire and support every business.

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- United Utilities
- Walgreen Boots Alliance
- Sky UK

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