



REPORT

STATE OF THE NATION 2025

For leaders, by leaders



Schroders

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This report has been made possible thanks to Hogan Lovells and Schroders.

Hogan Lovells is one of the biggest law firms in the world, with 2,800 lawyers spanning five continents. As a business, it has committed 259,000 responsible business hours worldwide.

Schroders is a leading provider of active asset management. It also provides advisory and wealth management services. It is recognised as a leader in sustainability, operating in 38 countries globally.





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A note from the Chair of Business in the Community...



Peter Harrison
Chair, Business in the Community,
Independent Non-executive and Chair
Designate, Morgan Sindall Group

This report encapsulates the perspectives of senior leaders from across the UK's 450 largest companies, offering an in-depth analysis of the current and future state of responsible business in our nation.

Given the economic and geopolitical uncertainty, fast-moving change of technology and challenging issues in communities, the imperative for sustainable and ethical business practices has never been greater. This report highlights the impact of these uncertainties on investment while documenting the evolving role of business and the expectation on its leadership to find solutions to the greatest societal and environmental issues we face. It is therefore not surprising that business leaders are leaning into societal issues while grappling with macro challenges including climate change and emerging technologies. The report also shows new ways of doing business, with firms seeking opportunities to collaborate and work as part of a broader ecosystem to tackle systemic issues.

The scale of the issues is daunting, and yet I am encouraged by the willingness of the leaders interviewed to step up and be the change, rather than wait for others to take action. The power of the Business in the Community network is in its willingness to share their experiences and their readiness to collaborate to find new solutions where they are needed.

I am grateful to all those who took part in the survey and interviews for their openness and honesty. A particular thank you to Schroders for its continued sponsorship of this research, as well as to Hogan Lovells for its support. The report begins a process of engagement and action, and I look forward to what will, I hope, become an annual conversation and catalyst to be braver and work faster on taking the action needed, so that together, business can lead the way.



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A note from Schroders...



Richard Oldfield
Group Chief Executive,
Schroders plc
Co-sponsor of this report

This year's *State of the Nation* report arrives at a pivotal time for the UK economy. As a business community, we are navigating the interwoven headwinds of economic uncertainty, geopolitical shifts and a challenging social landscape. Yet this report shows clearly that responsible business is not a distraction from growth during this uncertainty, but a key driver of it.

At Schroders, we believe that sustainability is integral to long-term financial performance. This research offers both the data and insights to support that view, with nine in ten of the business leaders surveyed agreeing that responsible business is a driver of long-term economic growth. Addressing the risks and opportunities of environmental and social change is not just the right thing to do, but is key to unlocking the UK's economic potential.

What stands out in this report is the clarity of action. Business leaders are not waiting for perfect conditions. They are doubling down on their commitments, targeting investments where they deliver the greatest impact and working across sectors to scale what works.

There is, of course, much more to do. I hope this report serves as both a call to action and a source of confidence that, together, we can grow responsibly and help lift up the UK.



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Report Summary and Findings

This report represents the views of business leaders surveyed and interviewed as part of Business in the Community's 2025 *State of the Nation* research.

Leaders were asked to share their priorities and expectations of each other and of the challenges they face. Unambiguously, contributing leaders agreed that economic prosperity must be the common goal. The majority are maintaining or increasing their commitment to responsible business, recognising it is a foundation for growth. They remain committed to addressing local community issues and their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is resolute. However, they are sharing less information publicly for fear of backlash. Similarly, their renewed emphasis on managing risk has resulted in some critical aspects of responsible business, such as nature stewardship, being downgraded in terms of action or importance. There is an urgent and unifying call for better collaboration to find solutions to systemic societal and environmental issues, with a specific call for the Government to work more closely with businesses to tackle societal inequality and opportunity in the most disadvantaged communities in the UK.

It is positive that business leaders are reporting their support for the economic growth agenda and remaining committed to the responsible business agenda as a foundation for growth and success; however alongside these conversations, we have also spoken with community leaders from across the UK.

When you directly compare these insights, it becomes clear that economic prosperity and opportunity for all is impossible with the scale of need and inequality seen in some of our most underserved communities. Community, voluntary and education sector organisations are being stretched to an unsustainable point. Increasingly, alongside the services they exist to deliver, they are being pushed to deliver crisis interventions. This is not the time for business to simply 'maintain commitments' to responsible business. It is a time for bold and brave leadership, greater collaboration and a much quicker way of sharing solutions.

Concerning responsible business, findings from business leaders revealed:

- **Not a distraction but a foundation**
Business leaders believe that responsible business is a foundation for economic growth and prosperity, rather than a distraction from it. They see the link between healthy societies, environments and their business success.
- **Not de-prioritising but de-publicising**
Business leaders are steadfast in their commitments to responsible business (96%) but are less vocal about them. This trend of de-publicising may hinder our progress in tackling key societal and environmental challenges.
- **Risk mitigation cannot masquerade as responsible business**
Many businesses are adopting a risk-averse approach to responsible business due to the current economic and political environment. While integrating risk management is important, it should not replace genuine responsible business efforts, which require bold and collaborative action against key DEI, environmental and societal issues.
- **The mismatch between communities and businesses is a big risk**
There is a significant contrast between the perspectives of business leaders and community leaders. While business leaders are focused on economic prosperity built on responsible foundations, community leaders feel that current efforts are insufficient and communities are being left behind. This mismatch lies at the heart of a larger threat to our overall economic prosperity.
- **Focused action requires partnership**
The challenges faced by communities cannot be solved by individual efforts alone. Collaboration between different sectors, including Government and community leaders, is essential to address deeply rooted issues and achieve significant impacts at scale.



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Business leaders recognise the important role Business in the Community plays in supporting and challenging businesses to address DEI, climate change and community issues. In particular, they recognise the value in immersing leaders in communities, providing time to listen and better understand the impact of poverty and inequality. These immersions help leaders understand the multi-faceted ways they can offer support personally, as well as through their own business processes. Time and time again, what surfaces is the desperate need for support amongst the organisations they meet, the lack of awareness of where to turn for support or how business can help beyond funding. Without addressing these critical needs, many of the programmes and interventions currently made available by the corporate sector are failing to have the desired impact.

Business in the Community is calling for a concerted collaborative response from business and an exponential growth in partnerships to deliver the change needed to ensure prosperity for all. Without this, there is a real possibility that both businesses and communities will fail to secure the prosperity they seek.

Methodology

This report is based on a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative insights to understand the perspectives of UK business leaders on responsible business and economic growth.

We surveyed senior leaders, including CEOs, Chairs and Executive Committee members from some of the UK’s largest companies across a range of sectors. The survey was conducted between January and May 2025, and responses were anonymised to encourage honest and open input.

In parallel, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with business leaders to explore their priorities, challenges and aspirations in greater detail. We considered these responses alongside survey responses from key community leaders, giving us a fuller insight into the state of responsible business across our nation.

This research builds on the methodology used in the 2024 *State of the Nation* report, allowing for a year-on-year comparison and tracking of sentiment. It was designed and delivered by Business in the Community in collaboration with our partners, and it forms part of our ongoing commitment to understanding and advancing responsible business in the UK.



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The Leadership Perspective

Business and Community

	What we heard from business leaders:	What we heard from community leaders:
The mismatch between what business leaders are saying and what community leaders are experiencing.	96% of business leaders have maintained or increased the priority they give to addressing societal and environmental challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Despite this, 92% of community leaders say that their greatest material risk is access to funding to continue these services.■ 9 in 10 are concerned about their capacity and resources.■ And 85% state demand for their services is increasing.
The challenges driving demand for community services also impact business success.	9 in 10 business leaders agree that societal challenges in the UK were directly affecting their success, citing the lack of effective skills training, cost of living and high levels of economic inactivity.	8 in 10 community leaders agree that societal challenges in the UK were causing a significant change in the demand for their organisation's services, citing the health and wellbeing of the population, cost of living and high levels of economic inactivity as the reasons for this increased demand.
More needs to be done by both business and the Government to address societal and environmental issues.	Only 37% of business leaders thought that the Government is collaborating effectively with businesses to address major societal and environmental challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Only half of community leaders report receiving ongoing support from businesses.■ Among their top priorities:<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 83% highlighted funding■ 61% identified skilled volunteering■ 28% expressed a need for product donations



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Who we spoke to

Since the start of 2025, we have surveyed a range of leaders. Thank you to everyone involved and, in particular, to the business and community leaders who gave their time and knowledge to provide further insights that have helped shape this report.

- Charles Lord Allen of Kensington CBE, Chairman of Balfour Beatty and THG plcHywel Ball, UK & Ireland Managing Partner & UK Chair, EY
- Alex Baldock, Group Chief Executive, Currys plc
- Daniel Barlow, Managing Partner, Regional Markets, Deloitte
- Hywel Ball, EY UK Chair, EY
- Dame Amanda Blanc, Chief Executive Officer, Aviva
- Andrew Bridge, Managing Partner, Fisher German
- Simon Carter, Chief Executive, British Land
- Lucinda Charles-Jones, Portfolio Non-Executive Director
- Sir Ian Cheshire, Chair of the Board, Landsec
- Dame Debbie Crosbie DBE, Chief Executive Officer, Nationwide Building Society
- Roisin Currie CBE, Chief Executive, Greggs
- Sean Doyle, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, British Airways
- Emma Gilthorpe, Former Chief Executive Officer, Royal Mail
- Malcolm Gomersall, Chief Executive Officer, Grant Thornton
- Matt Hammerstein, Chief Executive Officer of the UK Corporate Bank & Head of Public Policy & Corporate Responsibility, Barclays
- Peter Harrison, Independent Non-executive and Chair Designate, Morgan Sindall Group and the Chair of Business in the Community
- Adolfo Hernandez, Chief Executive Officer, Capita



- Craig Hodgson, Partner, Mills & Reeve LLP
- Steve Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, Coventry Building Society
- Louise Kingham CBE, Senior Vice President, Europe & Head of Country, UK, bp
- Parminder Kohli, UK Country Chair and Executive Vice President Sustainability and Carbon, Shell UK Ltd
- Paul Lewis, Firmwide Managing Partner, Linklaters
- Andy Milner, Chief Executive Officer, Amey Group
- Lyssa McGowan, Chief Executive, Pets at Home
- Scott McCroskie, Chief Executive Officer, Edrington
- Eoghan O'Lionaird, Chief Executive, Wates Group
- Richard Oldfield, Group Chief Executive, Schroders plc
- Alistair Phillips-Davies CBE, Chief Executive, SSE
- Steve Rempel, Senior Vice President & International Chief Information Officer, Walgreens Boots Alliance
- Simon Roberts, Chief Executive Officer, Sainsbury's
- Lord Rose, Chairman, Asda Group Board
- Shaheen Sayed, Market Unit Lead – UKIA, Accenture
- David Schwimmer, Chief Executive Officer, London Stock Exchange Group
- Mark Thurston, Chief Executive Officer, Anglian Water
- Keith Weed CBE, NED, Sainsbury's & WPP

This research includes findings from our survey with community leaders from a cross-section of organisations from across the UK, including:

Blackpool FC Community Trust, BRIC Blyth, C-Change West London, Calmore Junior School Association, Chapter One, Choice International, Claremont First Step Community Centre, CNTW NHS Foundation Trust, Digital Arts Box CIC, Eden Gate, Empowerment, Energize STW Active Partnership, Feltham Arts Association, Ferry Project Wisbech, G15 Thriving Places, Green Street, Hainworth Wood Community Centre, Hartlepool College of Further Education, Heart of the City, Heston Action Group, Kidcare4U, Kirklees Youth Alliance CIO, Magic Club CIO, Maindee Primary School, Maindee Primary School Community Trust, Meadow Well Connected, Men Matter Scotland, Mothers Matter, Natural England, Norwich Foodbank, Oasis UK, Queerwell, Repair Cafe Wales, Room for Work – London, /together, The Arts Factory, The Gap Wales, The Hope Foundation, The Rekalibrator CIC, True to the Cause, Tylorstown Welfare Hall



The Lens UK Responsible Business Podcast, produced by Business in the Community, creates a space for open and unscripted conversations between current and future leaders, challenging the way we all think about responsible business. We partner with One Young World to connect with future leaders worldwide.



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Not a distraction but a foundation for growth

The study clearly indicated that leaders believe responsible business is not a distraction from growth – it is the foundation for it.

Every senior leader surveyed listed the national economic outlook as one of their most significant business risks. In this difficult climate, budgets are squeezed, and responsible business can be the first target.

But our survey of the leaders of the UK's largest companies shows that that would be a mistake, with 90% of respondents declaring that responsible business is a driver of their long-term growth.

None of our respondents believed that responsible business would constrain future growth.

And what's good for business is good for the country. 80% of business leaders agreed that responsible business would ensure long-term economic sustainability for the UK economy.

The challenge is for businesses to capitalise on this opportunity. The leaders we spoke to made it clear that responsible business supports their economic growth because they are targeted and forensic in where they invest, ensuring that they focus on their material issues and key stakeholders in a way that benefits their bottom line.

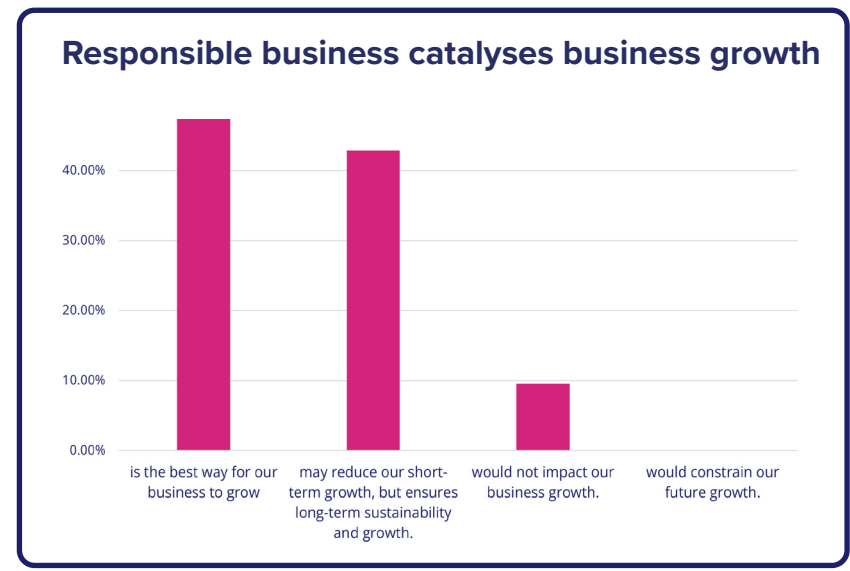


Figure 1: Which of the following statements most closely aligns with the view held by your business in the UK? "Addressing societal and environmental issues..."

Business in the Community recognises that business leaders are resounding in their belief that economic growth and prosperity must be their organisation's main priority. They believe their commitment to responsible business is far from a distraction from generating such economic growth and prosperity. In fact, it is the foundation for it: responsible business is good business.

It's clear that leaders recognise the inextricable link between healthy societies, healthy environments and healthy businesses. They appreciate their ability to contribute to, and generate, better places to live and work. Therefore, it's not surprising they want current and future business efforts to be built on responsible foundations.

This has resulted in businesses often taking a much more strategic approach to responsible business efforts. Interviewees discussed the need for their responsible business efforts to be targeted, focused on impact and aligned with broader organisational vision and values. This is all to be welcomed. Indeed, for decades, Business in the Community has sought to support and inspire businesses to take a more strategic approach to responsible business. However, the challenges become more apparent when we consider if/how organisations are publicising their efforts (see next finding).



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“ Sustainability can be a core part of business strategy, from addressing the societal issues impacting your business to harnessing new opportunities in fast-growing sectors. Of course, delivering on sustainability can come with a short-term cost, but the most successful organisations in this space still realise growth by aligning their purpose with performance and focusing relentlessly on what matters most to their stakeholders and their bottom line. In a volatile economic environment, this alignment is a strategic imperative for both growth and resilience.

” **RICHARD OLDFIELD, GROUP
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SCHRODERS PLC**



“ I really do believe that being a responsible business is part of our growth strategy, because at our heart, we're a business that relies on people and our stakeholders just have an expectation that we should behave in a responsible way.

” **ROISIN CURRIE CBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
GREGGS PLC**



“ I believe that purpose and profit must go hand in hand. If something doesn't make money, it's not sustainable. We're a commercial enterprise, and it's by making profits that we earn the right to continue to be a powerful force for good in the world, making a difference to millions of lives.

” **ALEX BALDOCK, GROUP CHIEF
EXECUTIVE, CURRYS PLC**



“ Ultimately, I think we can find sustainable or better solutions. We just have to think a bit harder and not just take some solution of the past. Sustainable solutions will endure far longer.

” **ALISTAIR PHILLIPS-DAVIES CBE, CHIEF
EXECUTIVE, SSE**



“ Everything we do for people, pets and the planet, we do because it's the right thing and aligns with our purpose, but there's also a valuable payback. These actions underpin the trust of our colleagues and consumers, driving retention, engagement, and brand reputation.

” **LYSSA MCGOWAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
PETS AT HOME**





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Over the last year, we've become familiar with headlines proclaiming a global business backlash against environmental, social and governance (ESG), net zero and DEI. From Meta¹ to Disney², blue-chip companies have publicly renounced their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Previous ESG champions have walked back their commitment and funding³. Governments around the world are reducing their ESG reporting requirements^{4,5}.

Yet, as this research shows, and as we observed in the previous section, UK business leaders are holding their course, with 96% saying they have either maintained or increased the priority they give to tackling societal and environmental issues.

However, while UK business leaders remain committed to responsible business, the backlash has still had an effect, with leaders growing more cautious and muted over their impact.

While the leaders we spoke to were standing strong on responsible business, nearly half (44%) said that their clients and customers had decreased the priority they give to responsible business over the last year. Our interviews however showed that this perception is likely due to their clients and customers being less vocal on responsible business because of changing expectations from some stakeholder groups, rather than these businesses limiting their impact.

A survey of USA executives found a similar approach: 80% of sustainability executives said their companies were adjusting their ESG strategies in response to the new administration and backlash, but the most common change (52%) was a change in messaging away from the term "ESG". Asked about the future of business action on societal and environmental action, 90% of those surveyed said that it will persist or intensify over the coming years.⁶

The commitment is still there, but it is quieter and more cautious. Nonetheless, the shift in tone shouldn't be mistaken for a retreat.

How has the priority your business gives to responsible business changed in the past year?

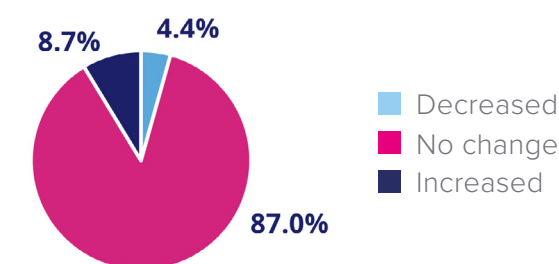


Figure 2: How has the priority your business gives to responsible business changed in the past year?

How has the priority your clients and customers give to responsible business changed in the past year?

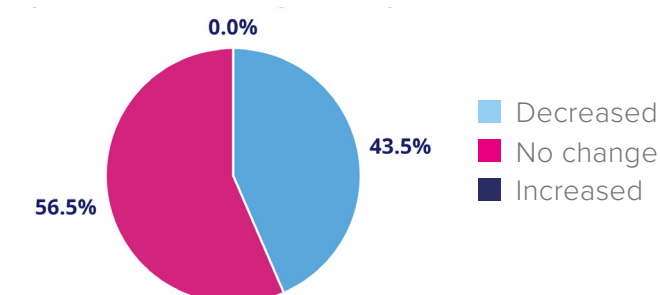


Figure 3: How has the priority your clients and customers give to responsible business changed in the past year?

¹ [Meta and Amazon scale back DEI programmes joining corporate rollback – BBC News](#)

² [Disney Shifts Away from DEI To Return to Its Entertainment Business Mission](#)

³ [How BlackRock Abandoned Social and Environmental Engagement](#)

⁴ [EU Parliament Committee Proposes Much Deeper Cuts than Omnibus to Sustainability Reporting Laws – ESG Today](#)

⁵ [SEC.gov | SEC Votes to End Defense of Climate Disclosure Rules](#)

⁶ [Survey: 80% of Corporations Are Reworking ESG Strategies Amid Policy Shifts](#)



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Business in the Community welcomes the fact that businesses are ‘holding the course’ as an alternative to the ‘anti-responsible business’ narrative which is becoming commonplace. However, our interviewees did confirm a trend of de-publicising, rather than de-prioritising their responsible business activities.

While understandable, given the trend for clients and customers to place decreasing emphasis on responsible business (see Figure 3), businesses’ silence on responsible business is potentially problematic. Reticence from business to discuss matters such as DEI may be misinterpreted as a lack of interest or prioritisation of the issue, yet our leaders have emphasised how much DEI matters to their businesses and communities. Equally, authenticity is critical for today’s businesses and leaders, and we’ve already seen negative press against companies rescinding their sustainability commitments. It is critical businesses continue to shine a light on the responsible business issues that matter most.

Also, half of the community leaders interviewed in this study indicated they either a) have no relationship with business, or b) receive support, but only when they approach the business directly. The question begs, if businesses aren’t talking about their responsible business commitments, then how will relationships and synergies with communities be identified, nurtured and leveraged to benefit those who need it most?

Ultimately, the responsibility to act collectively on issues of responsible business should not fall solely to those organisations participating in the likes of Race at Work⁷ or the Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality⁸. As the previous finding has shown, the UK’s business leaders are firm believers in responsible business being the foundation for economic growth. In de-publicising these beliefs and efforts, we are missing a critical opportunity to act collectively to inspire other businesses to follow suit and add weight to the responsible business movement.

“

We are standing firm on our commitments to do the right thing.

”

**DAME DEBBIE CROSBIE DBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER, NATIONWIDE BUILDING SOCIETY**



“

The corporate world is going to continue to do what we think is the right thing and to focus specifically on what’s good for business. We’re just not going to shout about it as much.

”

**SIR IAN CHESHIRE, CHAIR OF
THE BOARD, LANDSEC**



⁷ Business in the Community’s Race at Work campaign: www.bitc.org.uk/race

⁸ Business in the Community’s The Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality: www.bitc.org.uk/the-times-top-50-employers-for-gender-equality



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“ Is anything going to change our core values? No. We will always strive for excellence and lead as one team – acting with integrity and respect. Fundamentally, we want to attract and retain the best talent to solve the biggest, most complex issues for our global clients. To achieve that, you need to support your people so that they can perform at their best and, given no one group has a monopoly on talent, embrace diversity. It’s good for our clients, it’s good for our people and it’s good for our business.

PAUL LEWIS, FIRMWIDE MANAGING PARTNER, LINKLATERS



“ We’ve not seen this DEI backlash as a reason to retreat. Our responsibility is greater now than it was 12 months ago, and we’re not backing away from any of our commitments.

MALCOLM GOMERSALL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GRANT THORNTON



“ The vast, vast majority of global and UK businesses are trying to align their business with the values of society and the advancement of society.

DANIEL BARLOW, MANAGING PARTNER, REGIONAL MARKETS, DELOITTE





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Risk mitigation cannot masquerade as responsible business

The national economic and geopolitical outlooks emerged as the top two risks facing UK businesses in this year's research. Every business leader surveyed (100%) identified the national economic outlook as a major risk, while 69% highlighted geopolitical uncertainty as a significant concern. As the Chairman of Balfour Beatty, Lord Charles Allen, put it, "*in 45 years business has never faced the level of Global uncertainty that it does now.*"

Yet many leaders have found that responsible business can unlock more stable growth and can help to reduce business risk.

9 in 10 leaders surveyed agreed that societal challenges in the UK were directly affecting their success, with most pointing to the lack of effective skills training, the cost of living and the high levels of economic inactivity. Some respondents had therefore worked with their communities to address these issues and to de-risk their business and their future growth.

There is evidence to show that this de-risking is working as responsible businesses are enjoying more stable stock prices⁹ and experiencing faster recovery during seismic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁰. However, this research has shown that the emphasis on addressing risk has resulted in some key environmental and societal issues being relegated.

While evidence from Business in the Community's Responsible Business Health Check has shown that good progress is being made, the emphasis on managing risk has resulted in a lag in some key aspects of responsible business. For instance, action on the environment lags societal action, and whilst nature stewardship was highlighted in last year's *State of the Nation* report as a critical, emerging trend, it remains the second-poorest-performing area amongst our responding organisations.

Top risks to your business' success



Figure 4: To what extent do you agree that the following factors pose material risks to your business's success in the UK?

⁹ [The effect of environmental, social, and governance \(ESG\) performance on the volatility of stock price returns: the moderating role of tax payment | Emerald Insight](#)

¹⁰ [Linking ESG ratings to returns and volatility | Case study | PRI](#)



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Risk mitigation cannot masquerade as responsible business

Business in the Community wasn't surprised to observe a strong theme of risk management throughout the interviews. Given the current economic and political environment, many businesses are taking a much more target-focused, risk-averse approach to responsible business.

Becoming more aware of the potential trade-offs associated with responsible business is a natural response, and an integration of risk discipline to responsible business activity is welcomed. However, caution should be taken that risk management does not detract from responsible business. There is an imperative, and an opportunity, for businesses to go beyond risk management to create further positive societal and environmental impacts. For example, emerging issues such as nature stewardship and circular economy could create advantages for early movers who are more willing to lead these agendas.

An integration of risk discipline to responsible business activity is welcomed, but responsible businesses have the opportunity to push beyond risk, to be brave and to lean into societal and environmental challenges that can only be solved through bold and collaborative action.

“ In the UK, we've got a pocket of London and the southeast, which is one of the most prosperous places in the world. And then, outside of that area, we have some of the poorest places. If we don't start to bridge that gap, I worry about the consequences. We need to get real, sustainable growth and start making the whole country feel more prosperous.

” **SEAN DOYLE, CHAIRMAN AND CEO, BRITISH AIRWAYS**



“ Operational resilience is a critical part of how we think about our role in the UK. So, while there are commercial opportunities in sustainability for us and our customers to capitalise on, acting on these societal and environmental issues is critically important from a risk-management perspective.

” **DAVID SCHWIMMER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LONDON STOCK EXCHANGE GROUP**



“ Our priorities have not changed in that addressing societal and environmental issues remains a top priority. We are focused on creating shareholder value while maintaining our climate commitment.

” **PARMINDER KOHLI, UK COUNTRY CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY AND CARBON, SHELL UK LTD**



“ Responsible business is risk mitigation for us now. There's no silver bullet, but when we take a whole bunch of actions, we see less risk on the societal issues affecting our business, like vandalism, shoplifting and—ultimately—violence in our shops.

” **STEVE REMPEL, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT & INTERNATIONAL CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, WALGREENS BOOTS ALLIANCE**





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The community mismatch is a big risk

The vast majority of the business leaders surveyed were maintaining or increasing the priority they give to addressing societal and environmental issues this year. They acknowledge the inextricable link between the success of their business and the health of our communities and planet.

The insights from Business in the Community’s Responsible Business Health Check this year reinforce that prioritisation. 77% of our members are taking a coordinated approach to responsible business, and only 18% of large business members are just starting out on their responsible business journeys.

Clearly, business is remaining committed to being responsible. However, evidence from our communities demonstrates that business needs to go further, faster. More than 5m UK adults are experiencing simultaneous financial, health, and housing insecurity¹¹; a record 4.5m children are living in poverty in the UK¹²; and record social immobility costs the UK an estimated £19bn¹³, showing the need for businesses to focus on where there is greatest need and opportunity for impact.

These shocking statistics are compounded by feedback from our community leaders, 92% of whom cite a lack of funding is presenting a material risk to their services. A further 85% have said their demand for services is increasing.

When we connect business leaders with communities, we hear the same challenges from the community organisations bearing the brunt. The Chief Officer of one partner organisation summarised her situation, and their need for support: *“We are no longer just a safety net for some who slip through the net of statutory provision. We are an essential tier in the provision of services, without the necessary funding or recognition.”*

While business is committed to achieving growth responsibly, there is an emerging, and quickly growing, mismatch between what business and community leaders believe lies ahead for our nation.

“

Good companies take responsible business and their role in communities seriously – it is part of their DNA.

”

LUCINDA CHARLES-JONES, PORTFOLIO NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Business in the Community believes the contrast between what business leaders and community leaders are saying about their current and future prospects is the starkest finding of all. While business leaders are steadfast in their focus on economic prosperity, with responsible business as its foundation, community leaders are cautioning that the current ‘business as usual’ is not enough and that communities are being left behind. Societal challenges are worsening, and many of the community organisations dedicated to addressing such challenges are struggling to meet demand and, worse still, remain viable.

While it is encouraging that a commitment to responsible business is enduring, there is no doubt our communities are struggling. A recent report by Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) noted that financial donations by the FTSE 100 is down over 8%, at a time when community leaders are reinforcing their need for donations.¹⁴

Communities are in an unprecedented state of crisis. The societal and environmental challenges we face are ultimately economic challenges. Without these challenges being addressed at pace, our businesses and communities will fall far short of the economic prosperity they all seek.

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/06/stress-crisis-uk-financial-health-housing-insecurity>
¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/27/children-poverty-Government-benefit-welfare-cuts-uk>
¹³ [Social mobility continues to fall – and moving up is harder if you grow up in the North or Midlands. | Inequality: the IFS Deaton Review](#)
¹⁴ [caf-corporate-giving-2024---the-ftse-100-and-beyond.pdf](#)



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Focused action requires partnership

When asked if the Government collaborates effectively with businesses to address major societal and environmental challenges, only 29% of leaders agreed. More than a third (35%) actively disagreed.

Similar findings arose from our survey of community leaders, who indicated their desire to build better relationships with business, as well as a need for Government to collaborate more.

Without coordinated effort across sectors, barriers to growth and impact remain in place, limiting the potential of both businesses and society.

For some, these barriers are financial, and businesses are having to cut their investment in communities because of the economic outlook or the impact of specific policies, such as the rise in Employers' National Insurance.

For others, clarity and stability are needed to invest for the long-term, especially for complex transformations, such as the transition to Net Zero emissions.

Business and community leaders recognise the value of collaboration and are keen to build relationships further. However, more needs to be done with government, with business leaders calling for action, beyond intention. Whilst policy decisions, such as the increase in National Insurance, has strained relationships between business and government, there is a willingness amongst business to collaborate with government to support our communities.


“The question now is how government translates intention into action. We’ve certainly seen the right intention, green papers, and white papers, but how can we get that into regulation and action?”

ADOLFO HERNANDEZ, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CAPITA



“We’ve heard the words, we’ve heard the music—where’s the action?”

LORD ALLEN OF KENSINGTON CBE, CHAIR, BALFOUR BEATTY, THG PLC



“Unfortunately, we just have to do less this year. We’re forecasting a decrease in year-on-year profitability, so unfortunately, we’re having to do a bit less on sustainability. A large part of that is the Employers’ National Insurance hike, which has hit us with an extra £6m bill in the middle of our P&L.”

SENIOR BUSINESS LEADER

Business in the Community has always understood that the environmental and social challenges we face cannot be solved by individual efforts. And yet, we know we will struggle to advance as a nation without them being solved.

We need a different approach. There are many examples of the positive impacts individual business have had on communities, but this study has shown the potential power of collaboration – the potential for what can be achieved when different sectors step away from ‘business as usual’ to integrate themselves in each other’s worlds and explore what can be achieved at pace, at scale. We must take the learnings from this approach and challenge ourselves to go further: to work in partnership with government and community leaders to address deeply rooted societal and environmental issues.



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Recommendation #1: Make responsible business central to your growth strategy

Too often, responsible business is treated as a parallel initiative—important, but separate. This mindset is no longer viable. The most resilient and forward-looking companies are those that integrate social and environmental responsibility into the very fabric of their business models.

It's encouraging to see growing recognition that responsible business drives growth. But unless it is embedded into the core strategy—planned, measured and reported alongside financial performance—its potential will remain underleveraged. The societal and environmental challenges we face are not peripheral; they are economic issues in disguise. If left unaddressed, they will erode the foundations of long-term prosperity, both nationally and for individual businesses.

To make responsible business central to your growth strategy:

- **Reframe it as a driver of value, not a cost** – Position responsible business as a core lever for innovation, resilience and long-term profitability.
- **Activate your chains of influence** – Engage employees, suppliers, partners and customers to co-create impact and embed responsibility across your value chain.
- **Think big, act local** – Address local environmental and societal challenges through strategic partnerships and macro-level thinking that align with your business goals.

“ If done well, responsible business, without doubt, can grow the economy; a version of responsible business that is both charitably good and connects to economic growth... but it's going to require some really detailed planning. It's a needle that we're going to need to thread, but like threading any needle, it's not easy and will require a lot of focused time, energy and effort.



MATT HAMMERSTEIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE UK CORPORATE BANK, HEAD OF PUBLIC POLICY & CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY, BARCLAYS



“ Responsible business is the best way for businesses to grow. Smart business means that you engage and understand all your stakeholders and what they need. Intuitively, that leads to the best opportunities for growth.



LOUISE KINGHAM CBE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, EUROPE & HEAD OF COUNTRY, UK, BP





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Recommendation #2: Address the community mismatch

The mismatch between business ambitions and community needs is one of the most striking findings emerging from this report. While many businesses have a positive impact in their communities, the statistics are clear: our communities are in a state of crisis, and ‘business as usual’ is not enough.

Government, business and communities are focused on their desire for prosperity, but this will not be achieved until we deal with some of the deep-rooted challenges pervading our communities. Doing so will help propel us towards economic prosperity. Failing to do so will drive economic and societal disadvantages even further.

The community mismatch must be addressed.

To address this community mismatch:

- **Immerse yourself in your communities** – Take time to hear from, and understand, the communities you serve. Immerse yourself in them, listening to their perspective and feedback. Understand the challenges they face and how your business can support them.
- **Balance the immediate need with longer-term strategy** – Consider what your business can do immediately, tactically, to address a local community issue and build trust. However, also consider how your organisation can have a longer-term, more strategic impact on the issue. A two-track approach of immediate support alongside longer-term strategic intervention will maximise the chances of enduring positive impacts, rather than short-term fixes.
- **Consider the local issue from a macro perspective** – Given today’s economic and geopolitical pressures, business leaders are increasingly looking for micro, local actions, but consider what presents as a local issue from a broader macro perspective. What does a macro-level solution look like? How can you work with others to drive it at pace and scale?

“ This year, we’re really focused on delivering impact and where we invest our time and resources to drive the greatest possible change. For example, we’ve raised £4m on food poverty in the last year, meaning millions of meals are going to people who really need it.

SIMON ROBERTS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SAINSBURY’S



“ We focus hard on creating societal and environmental benefits through our work, from our commercial work in prisons—leading to improved prisoner behaviour, mental health and prison standards—through to our 20-year partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award, where we focus on underprivileged kids and young people; we pioneered the apprenticeship scheme with them, and have donated over £2m of support to benefit about 140,000 young people.

ANDY MILNER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMEY GROUP





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Recommendation #3: Collective action, continuous progress

The challenges being faced in our communities cannot be solved by one actor, or even two. It is important for business leaders to be able to articulate which societal or environmental issues they are committed to addressing. But what's more important is the need to address them through advocacy, partnerships and collective action. It is imperative that collective action, focusing on continual progress, is at the heart of any attempts to rectify our societal and environmental issues.

For the Government's mission of growth to succeed, greater emphasis should be given to how the many different strategies, funds and initiatives it drives interlink and work together. And while it is positive to hear of the Government's commitment to working in partnership with communities, it is imperative that business is also at the table. Only then can we fully leverage the commitment business, Government and communities have to achieving economic prosperity for all.

To achieve collective action and continual progress:

- **Step in as partners** – Business cannot, and leaders should not think that business can, solve society's challenges alone. Business leaders should be able to clearly articulate the societal or environmental issues they are committed to addressing and how they are addressing them through advocacy, partnerships and collective action.
- **Lead where others can't** – Bring your resources, insights, innovation and agility to the table—elements that Government and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector alone cannot deliver. Leadership in these areas will accelerate progress and elevate impact.
- **Speak up as one** – Unite with other businesses to amplify your influence on issues that matter. Use networks, such as Business in the Community, to provide a collective voice on responsible business, campaigning for change and inspiring others to follow suit.
- **A call to Government** – Prioritise further devolution and localism by giving more power and funding to regional mayors for the establishment of business boards. Businesses have the appetite and commitment to collaborate at a local level to build on central Government funding for communities and help to 'power up' its work at a macro level.

“ I know many organisations are stepping back from inclusion and diversity, but if we want to be the employer of choice, it's right at the heart of who we want to be. ”

STEVE HUGHES, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, COVENTRY BUILDING SOCIETY



“ At Hogan Lovells, being a responsible business isn't just the right thing to do – it underpins our growth and long term prosperity. But we also know that we can't drive sustainable progress alone. That's why we work hand in hand with partners across sectors to innovate, collaborate and scale solutions that empower people and communities. ”

MICHAEL DAVISON, PARTNER, HOGAN LOVELLS





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Roisin Currie CBE
Chief Executive
Greggs

Greggs is a leading UK food-to-go retailer that offers great-tasting, high-quality food at low prices and with a friendly service.

With a rich heritage of more than 85 years, Greggs now has over 2,600 shops across the UK. Through its network of 1,000 Breakfast Clubs, [The Greggs Foundation](#) provides a free breakfast to 75,000 children every school day. Its support for the [Children's Cancer Run](#) has helped to raise more than £30m to fund research into improving recovery rates of children with cancer. Greggs is a responsible business that is committed to giving back to the local communities in which it serves.

“ I really do believe that being a responsible business is part of our successful growth strategy, because at our heart, we're a business that relies on our people, and our stakeholders just have an expectation that we behave in a responsible way. ”

ROISIN CURRIE CBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, GREGGS

As outlined in its sustainability plan, *The Greggs Pledge*, Greggs is committed to:

- **Building stronger, healthier communities** – through the Greggs Foundation Breakfast Club programme, putting an end to food waste, supporting communities through its outlet shops that sell day-old Greggs products at a heavily discounted price and donate a share of the profits back into the community and helping customers to make healthier choices.
- **Making the planet safer** – by going carbon-neutral, building shops of the future with an eco-focus and using less packaging.
- **Becoming a better business** – by embracing diversity, sourcing sustainably and protecting animal welfare.

LEADER PROFILE | Working with Business in the Community



The Lens – Putting business at the heart of communities is essential for everyone



The importance of business working together

Join the Leadership Journey with BITC ➔

The King's Seeing is Believing Visit | 2025

On The King's Seeing is Believing Visit to Glasgow, Roisin lead a group of senior leaders to see first-hand the challenges faced by communities, with a focus on food poverty and barriers to education and employment.





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Sean Doyle
Chairman and Chief Executive
British Airways



British Airways is the largest airline in the UK, offering flights to more than 170 destinations worldwide. It employs more than 40,000 people globally - the vast majority are in the UK.

British Airways is committed to maintaining the highest standard of corporate governance, driving performance responsibly and striving to make customer experiences more sustainable and inclusive. It creates opportunities in the communities where it operates, while using its unique skills to support those affected by crisis.

“ In the UK, we’ve got a pocket of London and the southeast, which is one of the most prosperous places in the world. And then, outside of that area, we have some of the poorest places. If we don’t start to bridge that gap, I worry about the consequences. We need to get real, sustainable growth and start making the whole country feel more prosperous.

We have lots of reasons to be positive about growth, whether it be growing foreign direct investment, a start-up culture, or a strong position in AI. The focus on infrastructure and skills is key to turning this opportunity into real economic opportunity.

SEAN DOYLE, CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, BRITISH AIRWAYS

Top responsible business priorities for British Airways

- **BA Better World Community Fund** – delivering life-changing opportunities in communities; supporting projects that focus on diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and climate action; and safeguarding biodiversity and nature.
- **Flying Start** – in partnership with Comic Relief, helping to give young people a chance to have a brighter future.
- **Helping communities respond in times of crisis** – working with the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)’s Rapid Response Network, BA raises funds to save, protect, and rebuild lives in communities impacted by major disasters. Since 2013, £2 million has been raised, and BA has supported 14 humanitarian crisis appeals.
- **Improving customer inclusion and accessibility** – aiming to be the airline of choice for customers with visible and non-visible disabilities.



The Lens – How can business build a better world?

Join the Leadership Journey with BITC



The King’s Seeing is Believing Visit | 2025

Sean attended The King’s Seeing is Believing visit to Hounslow in 2025. Situated in a Heathrow Airport catchment area for many BA employees, Sean saw first-hand the work being undertaken in communities, looking at gang crime and employability initiatives, and explored the difference education can make for young people in the area.





bp



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Louise Kingham CBE

Senior Vice President, Europe &
Head of Country, UK bp plc



Leadership Council member

bp is the UK's largest home-grown international energy company. Its purpose is to deliver energy to the world, today and tomorrow. Headquartered in London, the company has been based here for more than 110 years.

bp has five focused global sustainability aims that are considered integral to the long-term success of its businesses and to its ambition to be net zero by 2050 or sooner – net zero operations, net zero sales, improving people's lives by supporting employees and local communities through the energy transition, and caring for the planet by supporting biodiversity and reducing fresh water use in areas where they operate.

“

Responsible business is the best way for businesses to grow. Smart business means that you engage and understand all your stakeholders and what they need. Intuitively, that leads to the best opportunities for growth.

”

**LOUISE KINGHAM CBE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
EUROPE & HEAD OF COUNTRY, UK, BP PLC**

Responsible Business priorities for bp plc

In the UK, bp's social investments are predominantly directed towards three main areas of action aligned with its sustainability frame:

- **Building capability for the future** – by supporting education and the development of skills required to deliver energy today and in the future.
- **Supporting resilient communities** – through activities that support local livelihoods and enterprise, drive positive health and wellbeing outcomes and contribute to building community resilience.
- **Partnering for environmental sustainability** – working with partners to support projects that help restore and maintain biodiversity in the places it operates.



The Lens – Businesses can positively impact communities. How?

Join the Leadership
Journey with BITC



The King's Seeing is Believing Visit | 2025

Louise led a group of senior business leaders to Teesside to see first-hand the challenges faced by communities, with a focus on food poverty and barriers to education and employment. bp is supporting the region's regeneration as it progresses CCS and hydrogen projects with its partners.





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Paul Lewis
Firmwide Managing Partner
Linklaters

Linklaters is one of the world’s leading law firms. It is a high-performing, diverse team of exceptional, talented and highly motivated individuals who handle the biggest and most transformational mandates for the world’s leading corporates, banks and financial sponsors.

Linklaters has 30 offices in 20 countries and employs more than 5,300 people. It has a history of 200 years of guiding business through historical, economic and commercial changes, based on long-lasting relationships and groundbreaking work.

“Thanks to an introduction from BITC, we began working in Newport three years ago. We quickly recognised a place with passionate business leaders, an inspiring third sector and an ambitious and supportive local authority. Linklaters has since funded improvements to community buildings, provided pro bono advice to visionary projects and has brought young people to our London HQ for work experience and inspiration. Being part of the Pride of Place Programme and leading three visits has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my leadership career and one I was happy to share with our Executive Committee when I brought them down for an offsite (and mini-Seeing is Believing) at the end of last year! I’m delighted that we are supporting more unique experiences through our funding of The King’s Seeing is Believing nationwide, and in Newport, I remain excited about the huge opportunities for collaboration ahead, each new partnership effecting long-lasting change for communities that simply need a chance.”

PAUL LEWIS, FIRMWIDE MANAGING PARTNER, LINKLATERS

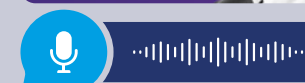
Strategic priorities for Linklaters

- **People** – to be known as the ‘best in class’ firm for diversity and inclusion, where people feel safe at work, are fairly rewarded and see their health and wellbeing properly addressed. Creating an inclusive culture where everyone, regardless of background, identity and circumstance can reach their full potential.
- **Environment** – continuing to look for opportunities to reduce its impacts and associated emissions, including through energy and resource efficiency, waste prevention, sustainable travel and supply-chain engagement.
- **Social impact** – seeking to draw on its talent, scale and imagination to tackle the vital challenges of today and tomorrow. Working in deep partnerships with third sector organisations, seeking to address their needs and to help them achieve transformative change.

Linklaters

The King’s Seeing is Believing Visit | 2025

Visit focus: Tackling poverty and inequality (with particular focus on food insecurity) and supporting communities most affected by deprivation; expanding access to skills and employment through stronger partnerships between employers, educators and local organisations.



The Lens – Putting business at the heart of communities

Join the Leadership Journey with BITC





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Appendix – research results

The charts shown demonstrate the results of the State of the Nation research with business leaders.

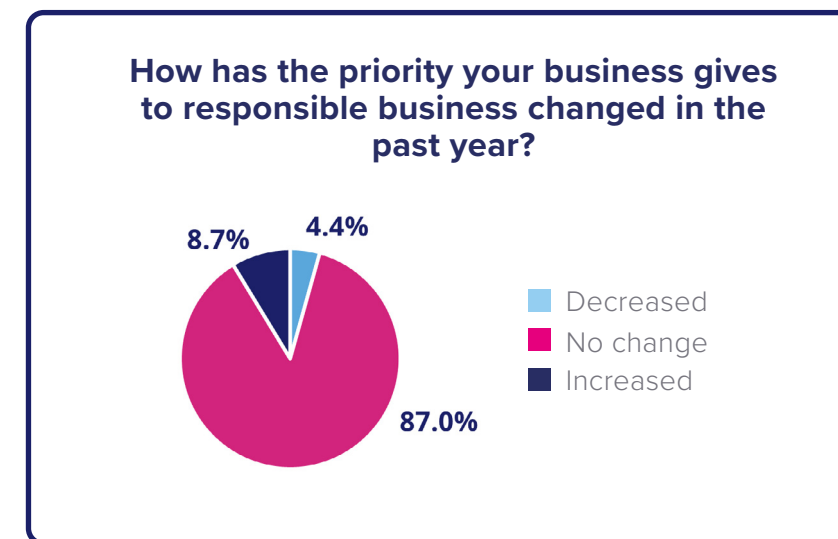
1. *CEO priorities: what are the greatest material risks to your business' success in the UK?*



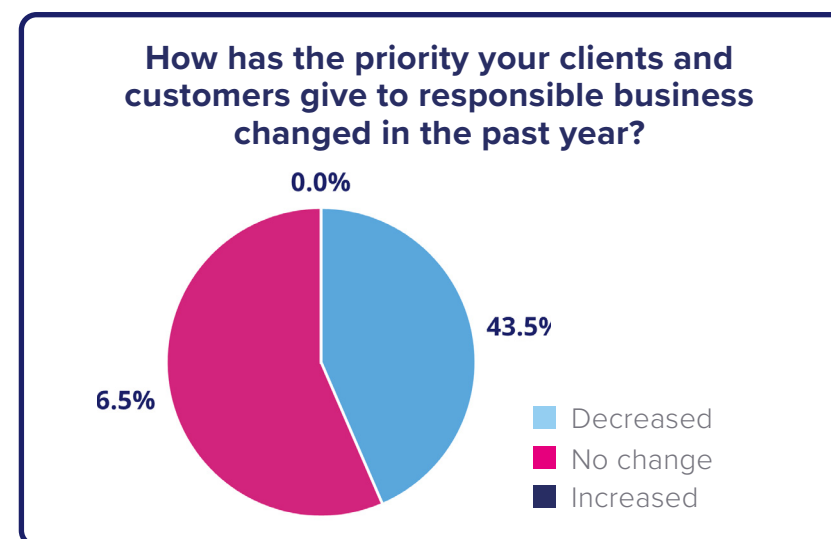
2. *Changing role of business: what role does your business play in addressing societal and environmental issues in the UK?*



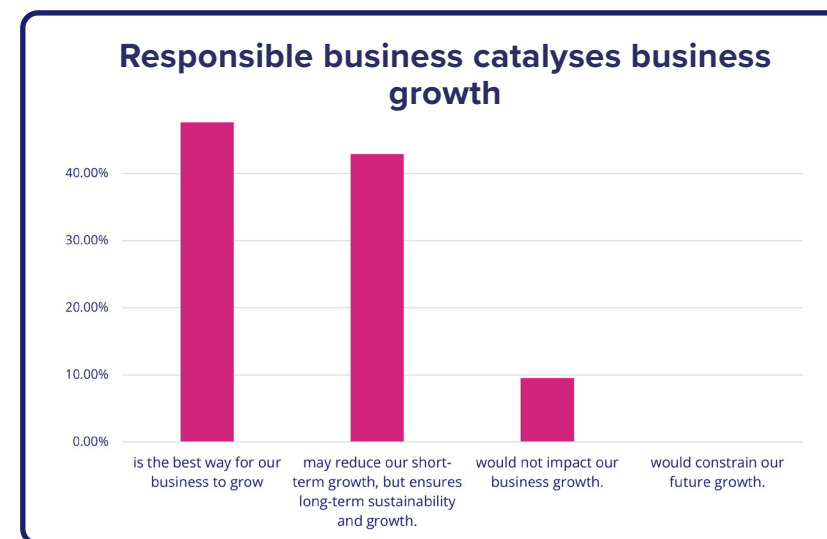
3. *Changing role of business: which of the following statements best describes how the priority your business gives to addressing societal and environmental issues has changed over the last year?*



4. *How has the priority your clients or customers give to addressing societal and environmental issues changed over the last year?*



5. *Responsible business & growth: which of the following statements most closely aligns with the view held by your business in the UK: Addressing societal and environmental issues...*





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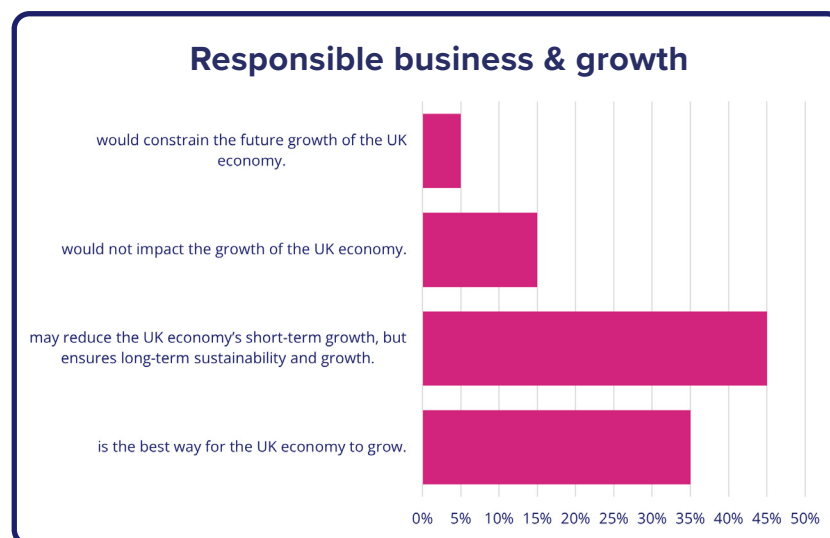
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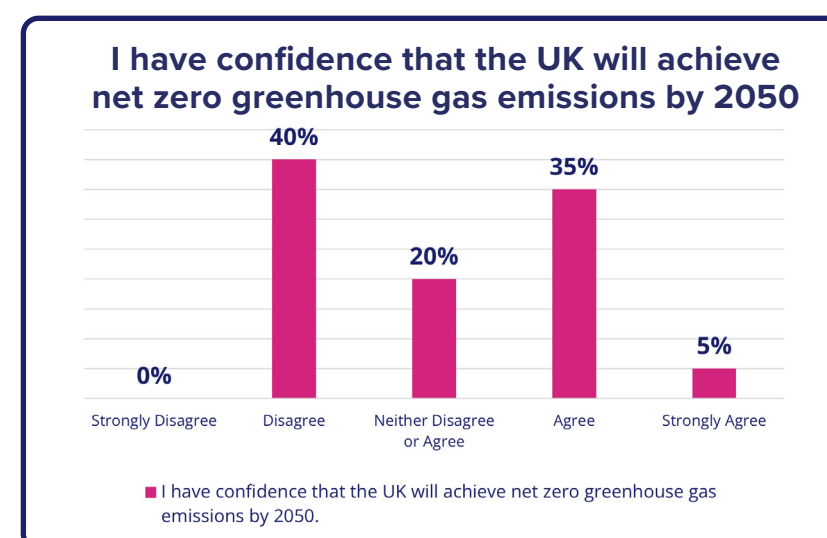
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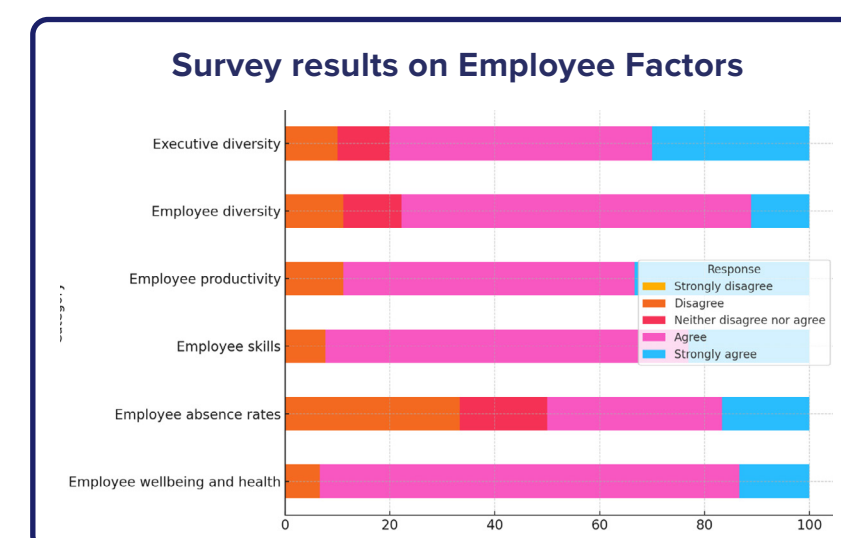
6. Which of the following statements most closely aligns with the view held by your business in the UK: Businesses addressing societal and environmental issues...



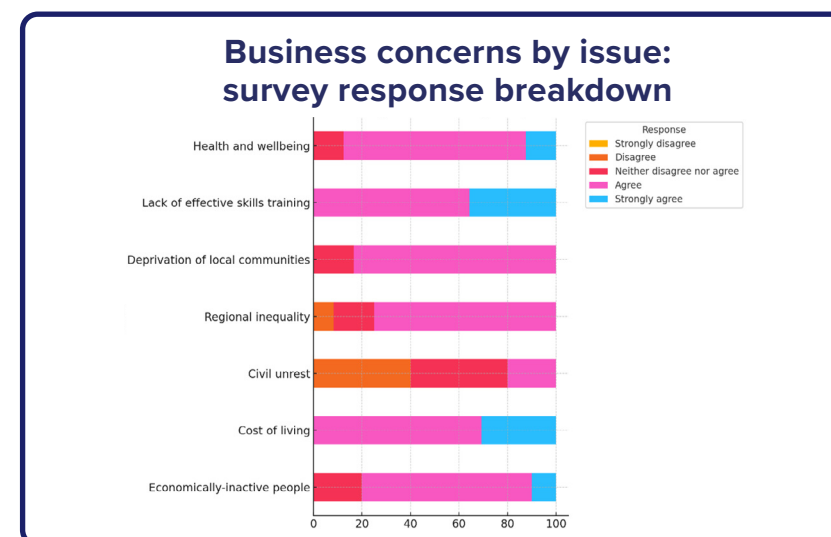
7. Societal & environmental issues: how much confidence do you have that we will reach net zero GHG emissions by 2050?



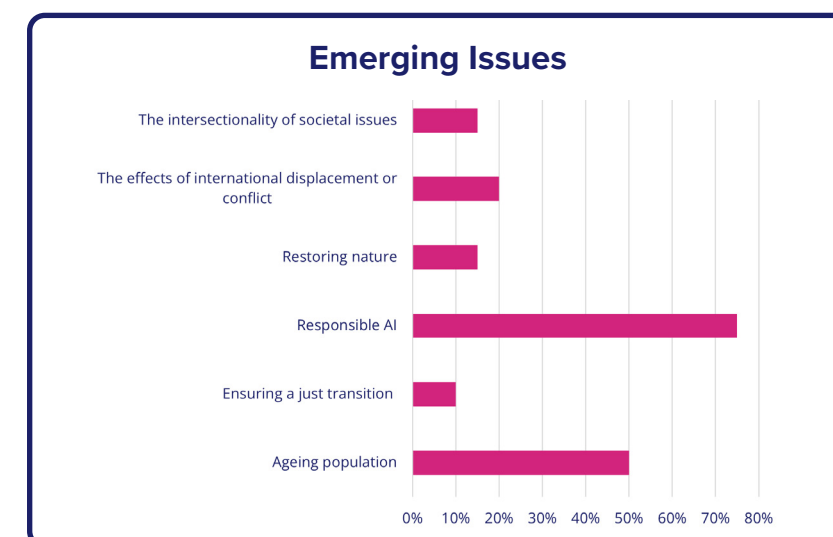
8. Societal and environmental issues: to what extent do you agree that the following societal issues in the UK are barriers to your business's success, unless they are addressed?



9. Societal and environmental issues: which issues facing your workforce are the greatest barriers to your business' success, unless they are addressed?



10. Societal and environmental issues: which societal or environmental issues are emerging and most likely to grow in importance for your business over the next five years?





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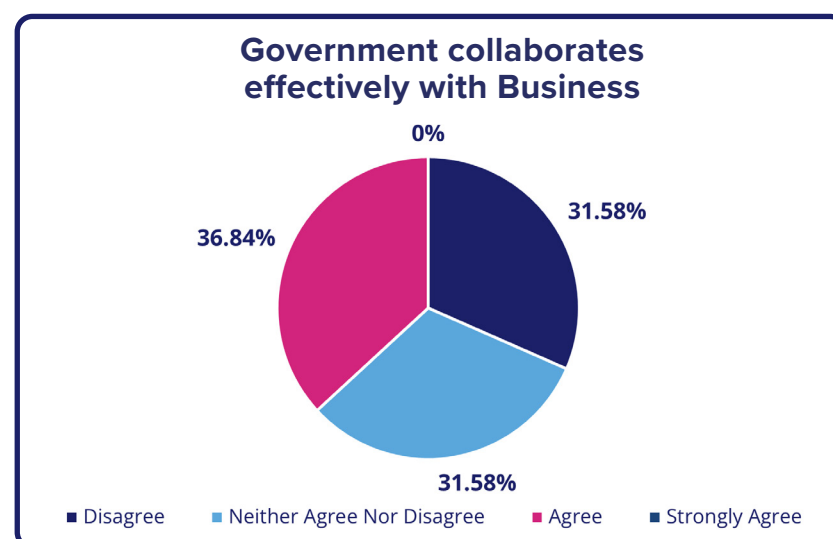
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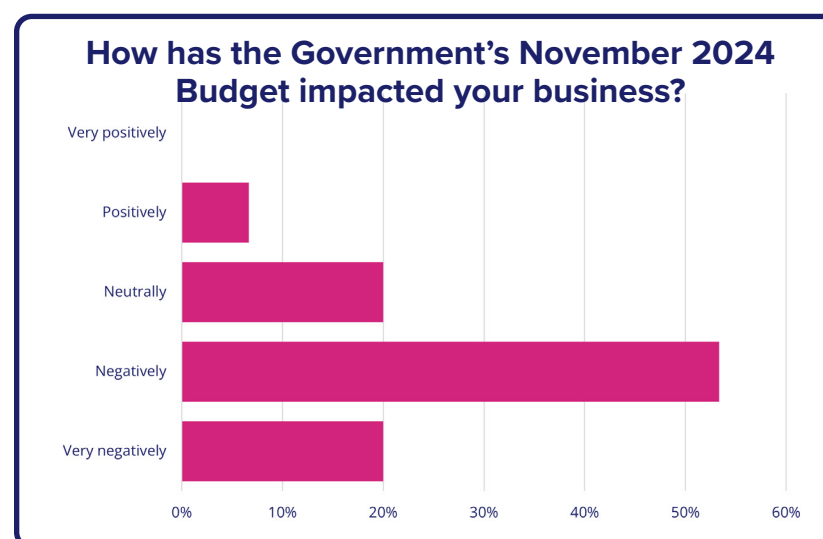
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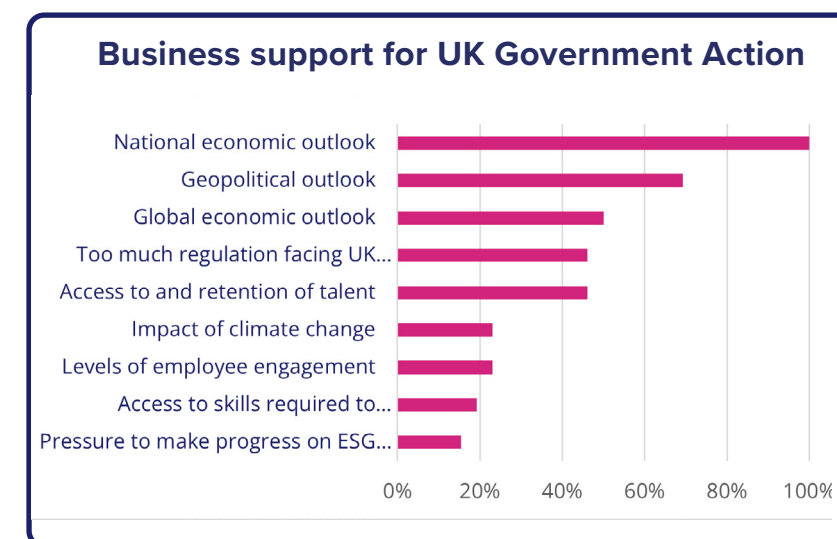
11. Government action: to what extent do you believe the Government collaborates effectively with businesses to address major societal and environmental challenges?



12. Government action: to what extent has the Government's November 2024 Budget impacted your business?



13. Government action: which responsible business areas would you most support Government action on?





BITC at Work

Business in the Community (BITC) is the UK's largest and most influential responsible business network dedicated to building a fairer and greener world together.

We inspire, engage and challenge leaders to take practical action to mobilise their collective strength as a force for good in society.

This year, we've made 1.2m jobs more accessible, supported 7m people to thrive in work and are currently transforming the places that 4m people call home in the UK.

For more information on how to join us, visit bitc.org.uk/join-us.

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Actions for Leaders

**Immerse, Act, Collaborate
and take action to Scale**

