WORKING TOGETHER

CBI/PERTEMPS EMPLOYMENT TRENDS SURVEY 2017

DECEMBER 2017

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Pertemps Network
the face of recruitment

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About the sponsor

As the UK's largest privately-owned recruitment agency, Pertemps Network Group (PNG) is firmly established as a leader in workforce talent solutions. In 2016 it was named the highest placed recruiter in the Sunday Times Grant Thornton Top Track 250.

Formed in 1961, it comprises Pertemps and Network Group – the former offering over 100 nationwide branches as well as outsourced managed solutions, and the latter made up of agencies operating in niche sectors including IT, legal, finance, healthcare, education, medical, construction, manufacturing and engineering.

All members of PNG are committed to delivering exceptional solutions tailored to the specific needs of UK businesses.

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Foreword

The UK stands at the beginning of a new era – not just in terms of Brexit, but even more importantly in how we adapt to, and prosper from, new technologies that are reshaping how we live. There can be no doubt that work will change, and with that change there is the possibility to create a higher skill, more competitive, more prosperous nation. We face an opportunity, not just a threat.

People will be at the heart of meeting that challenge. On skills, new technology and how we manage our workplaces there is much to do, as this survey sets out. We are delighted to have been able to work with Pertemps again this year to bring it to you. The positive base we start from shines out clearly from the data – high employment rates are likely to persist and employee relations are good.

Widening inclusion in our labour market is critical to success – work needs to be fair as well as flexible. Survey respondents support for improved enforcement emphasises this. And firms see the debate about work quality created by Matthew Taylor's review of modern working practices as positive, provided politicians avoid lazy generalisations about the flexible work that so many workers enjoy. There is also clear commitment in the survey to increasing the pace of progress on diversity.

Even so, we cannot ignore the clear longer-term message the survey gives. There are substantial concerns about the attractiveness of the UK to investment in future. Hopefully the progress of the Brexit negotiations earlier this month will help to reassure employers – but the clear message from the survey is that we must get issues like future skills and mobility policy right so businesses can deliver the UK-wide prosperity needed to deliver a successful industrial strategy.

Neil Carberry
Managing director, people & infrastructure
CBI

Foreword

Businesses have had an awful lot to deal with in 2017, from the Apprenticeship Levy to concerns over IR35, yet have still remained lively in the recruitment market with growth occurring in most sectors, as predicted this time last year.

Although there has been a lot of change in 2017, confidence is high among employers, with most expecting to expand on opportunities in the coming year. Growth is expected across all sectors, not only in permanent and temporary roles, but graduate and apprenticeship positions too.

In recent years, more businesses are finally waking up to the benefits of diverse workforces and I am delighted to see that inclusivity is, moving forward, at the top of most business agendas, with many seeing the introduction of flexible opportunities key to future success. Addressing gender pay gaps is also integral to attracting and retaining staff and is paramount for sustainable growth. As a diversity leader, Pertemps actively works with partners to ensure they are not excluding potentially important talent.

It is also worth noting that businesses want a labour market that is both flexible and fair. A flexible workforce is vital to competitiveness and the prospects for business investment and job creation.

2018 will see a bigger focus on employee engagement, improving leadership skills and retaining talent – three ideals that are central to the success of businesses up and down the UK.

Tracy Evans
Group HR and quality director
Pertemps Network Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The employment trends survey 2017

- The survey was conducted between August and October 2017
- There were 299 respondent businesses, employing around one million people between them
- Respondents came from businesses of all sizes and sectors from across the UK.

Businesses believe they can continue to generate jobs growth

- Over half (51%) of respondent businesses are looking to grow their workforces over the next 12 months
- Confidence is highest among small and medium-sized employers, with a positive balance of +58% expecting to add jobs in the coming year
- Growth is expected across all job types, with positive balance scores for permanent (+35%), temporary (+12%), graduate (+18%), and apprenticeship positions (+42%).

Businesses are walking a difficult line on pay

- Half of respondents (52%) aim to raise pay for their employees in line with (or above) inflation in the coming year and only 3% are planning to freeze pay
- Over half of businesses (55%) are now affected by the national living wage, with actions to cope with the costs among those affected ranging from raising prices (21%) to increasing investment in training (32%) to boost the value added by employees
- Looking four years ahead, a quarter (25%) of respondents affected are expecting to restructure their business models while nearly a third (30%) intend to increase automation.

Businesses are concerned that the UK labour market is becoming less competitive

- Half of UK businesses (50%) consider that the UK has become a less attractive place to invest and do business over the past five years
- Nearly two thirds (63%) of businesses currently believe that the UK will become a less attractive location over the next five years, with fewer than one in five (19%) expecting it to become a more attractive location
- The main current threats to the UK labour market are skills gaps (79%), access to labour supply (49%) and access to highly skilled migrants (43%), and businesses are not optimistic that these threats will be tackled effectively in the years ahead.

Diverse and inclusive workplaces can help businesses get the best from their people

- More than nine in ten respondents (93%) see achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce as important or vital to their future success, with seven in ten firms (70%) introducing or extending flexible working opportunities and two thirds (66%) investing in training for line managers
- Businesses identify the main benefits of inclusive workplaces as an increased ability to attract and retain people (52%) and increased skills and capabilities (50%)
- Among firms that have had to produce a gender pay gap report, just over six in ten respondents (62%) report that it has changed some aspect of their firm's diversity and inclusion strategy.

Businesses want a labour market that is both flexible and fair

- Virtually every respondent business (99%) believes a flexible workforce is vital or important to competitiveness and the prospects for business investment and job creation
- There is broad recognition across business (by 95% of respondents) that there are ways in which UK labour market enforcement could be improved, with the main emphasis on increasing employers' knowledge of their responsibilities (63%)
- Nine in ten businesses (90%) think that removing employment tribunal fees is certain or likely to lead to an increase in weak, misguided, or vexatious claims.

Businesses prioritise employee engagement as central to success

- More than seven in ten (71%) respondents report co-operative employee relations currently and a similar proportion (72%) expect to maintain this over the next 12 months
- Effective line management is the most frequently cited driver of employee engagement (by 64%), with more than four in five respondents (83%) highlighting increased productivity and performance as a benefit of an engaged workforce
- Achieving high levels of employee engagement (46%), improving leadership skills (44%) and retaining talent (35%) will be the top workforce priorities for businesses in the coming year.

The employment trends survey

This year's survey was carried out in the period August to October 2017. There were 299 respondent businesses in total. Their combined workforces amounted to around one million people – equivalent to about 3% of all employees in employment in the UK.[1]

Sectoral analysis

Respondents were drawn from all parts of the private sector (**Exhibit 1**). Manufacturing firms made up the largest single grouping (22%), followed by professional services businesses (13%). Organisations classed as 'other services' (10%) or 'other' (18%) made up more than one quarter of responses. These included businesses engaged in activities as diverse as media & publishing, property investment and education & training.

Exhibit 1: Respondents by economic sector (%)

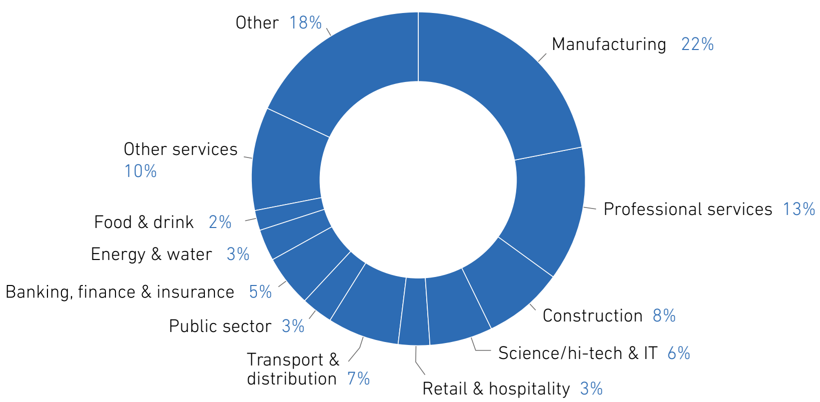
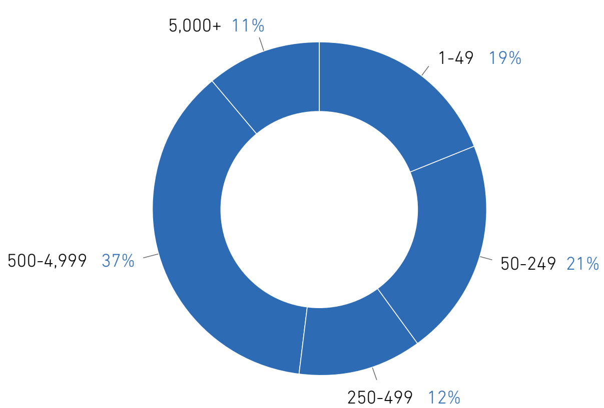


Exhibit 2: Respondents by number of employees (%)



Respondents by company size

Just under one in five respondents (19%) were small businesses with 49 or fewer employees, while just over one in ten (11%) were very large employers with over 5,000 employees (**Exhibit 2**).

Medium-sized businesses (MSBs) employing between 50 and 499 employees accounted for one third (33%) of participants.

Respondents by region

The majority of respondents had employees based in several regions of the UK (**Exhibit 3**). Nearly half had employees based in London (45%) while over one third had employees based in the south east (38%), the West Midlands (36%) and the north west (34%)

Overall, almost half of respondents (47%) had employees based in Scotland, Wales, and/or Northern Ireland where devolved parliaments or assemblies have an important role in policies affecting businesses.

Exhibit 3: Respondents by region (%)

CHAPTER 1

The employment landscape

Key findings

- The UK has performed well compared to other G7 countries on employment, including narrowing the gap between the employment rate of men and women
- Slack in the labour market remains but has been unwinding, with unemployment falling to a 42-year low and measures of underemployment also falling
- Slow productivity growth and higher inflation have squeezed real wages. Addressing this will be important for economic growth in the long term.

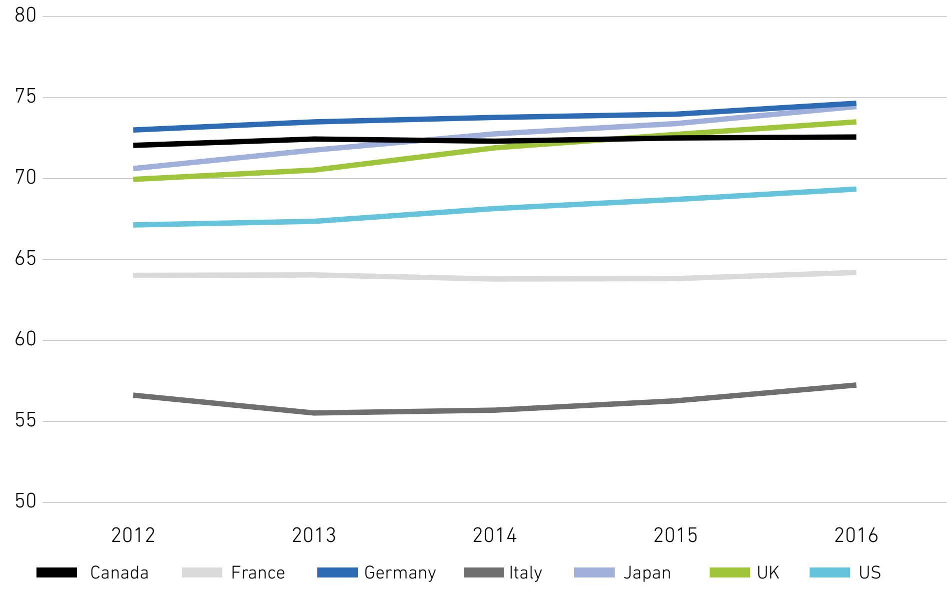
Employment hits new record highs...

Over the 12 months to September 2017, the number of people in work has risen by 279,000. The employment rate is now at 75%, close to a record high. A key driver behind this growth has been a significant increase in the number of women in work, which grew by 215,000 compared to an increase of 64,000 for men. This has led to a narrowing of the gap in the employment rate between men and women, down from 9.7% points to 8.9% points.[2]

The UK has performed well on employment compared to other countries worldwide (**Exhibit 4**). Based on OECD data, the UK's employment rate is higher than the G7 average (by 3.7% points). There are only a handful of OECD countries faring better than the UK in getting people into work, such as Sweden (76.8%) and the Netherlands (75.7%).[3]

But not all areas of the UK have seen employment growth. For example, the numbers of people in work increased most in London (+130,000), the south east (+114,000), and the north west (+90,000). But it fell in the East Midlands (-45,000), Wales (-28,000), and Northern Ireland (-16,000).[4]

Exhibit 4: Employment rates across the G7 nations (% of working age)



...with unemployment falling to a 42-year low...

Over the past year there has been a notable fall in unemployment, down by 182,000. The unemployment rate is now at 4.3%, down from 4.8% a year earlier. This is the lowest rate in over 42 years. A key factor in unemployment falling has been a decline in youth unemployment, which decreased by 96,000. No areas of the country saw an increase in unemployment.

While there are signs that there remains some slack in the labour market, this has been reducing throughout 2017 with a decline both in the number of people working part-time but unable to find full-time jobs (-103,000) and the number of people working in temporary roles but seeking more permanent work (-68,000).[5]

...but productivity remains stubbornly weak and wages are not keeping pace with prices

UK productivity, however, remains considerably lower than among international competitors, with output per hour 15.1% below the average for the rest of the G7 in 2016. And the gap between the UK's post-downturn productivity performance and pre-downturn trend (15.8%) is almost twice the G7 average (8.8%).[6]

The link between productivity and pay means that weak productivity growth continues to act as a brake on stronger pay growth. While pay growth has remained subdued, higher inflation means that real wages have now been falling for six straight months and are 0.4% lower on average than a year ago (**Exhibit 5**).[7]

Exhibit 5: Earnings growth and inflation, 2013-16

Calculated using real regular pay (seasonally adjusted) minus average weekly earnings

While rising employment is always positive, this must be combined with strong productivity-fuelled economic growth to deliver the high-wage economy that is the ambition of government and businesses.

The government's industrial strategy white paper was welcomed by the CBI and its members. It is extremely important that the government's industrial strategy can help businesses to address the UK's productivity challenge and deliver economic strength and resilience across the country. We believe that the strategy shows the government has its eye firmly on the horizon, but are clear that the hard work starts now.

In the CBI's recent budget submission, we called for a clear industrial strategy timetable that provides business with clarity around the consultations and sector deals promised by the green paper.[9] The announcement of the strategy goes someway towards this but is an important first step in a strategic race, rather than a tactical sprint. We will need consistent and determined action from government if the strategy is to help the UK seize the opportunities open to it and address the challenges we face.

Business and government must work together to set out the new industrial strategy, ensuring it supports the future success of the labour market.

CHAPTER 2

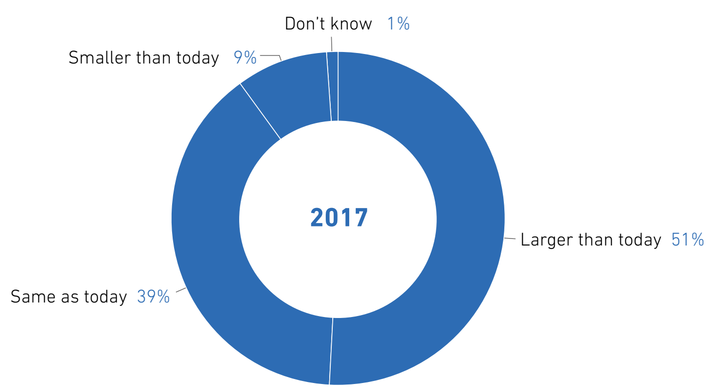
Businesses believe they can continue to generate jobs growth

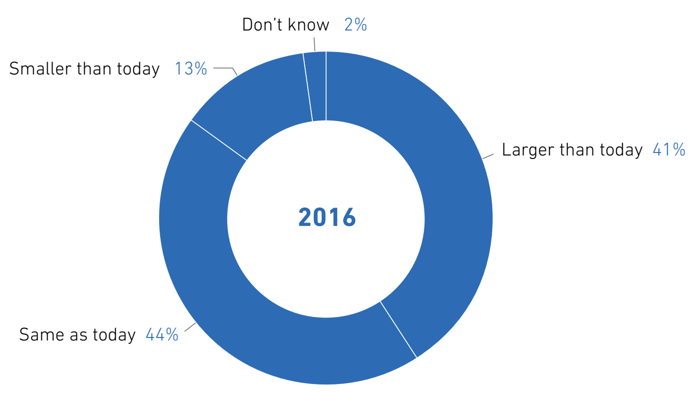
UK businesses remain optimistic about their ability to generate jobs in the short-term, building on the UK's record-setting labour market performance. This confidence is especially present in smaller firms. But delivering further jobs growth and offering more hours to those that want them in the longer term depend on businesses being confident they will be able to access the talent they need.

Key findings

- Over half (51%) of respondent businesses are looking to grow their workforces over the next 12 months
- Confidence is highest among small and medium-sized employers, with a positive balance of +58% expecting to add jobs in the coming year
- Growth is expected across all job types, with positive balance scores for permanent (+35%), temporary (+12%), graduate (+18%), and apprenticeship positions (+42%).

Exhibit 6: Expected size of workforce in 12 months' time, all respondents (%)





Employers expect to continue creating additional jobs in the short-term...

Over half of respondents (51%) expect to increase the size of their workforces over the coming 12 months (**Exhibit 6**). Less than one business in ten (9%) expects their workforce to be smaller in 12 months' time, while just under four in ten (39%) anticipate no change. Overall, a positive balance of +42% of organisations expect to have more employees in a year's time.

The UK in recent years has been hugely successful in generating new job opportunities. Our findings show businesses expect to be able to build on that successful record – provided the talent they need is available in the future.

... sustaining the impressive jobs performance of recent years

The positive hiring intentions of respondents to the 2017 survey build on the recent trend of impressive jobs growth (**Exhibit 7**). The positive balance of firms (those expecting to add employees minus those expecting to shed jobs) has stood at +20% or more every year since 2011. The 2017 result extends this run of job generation (+42%). As highlighted earlier in the report, it will be important in the long-term to combine this strong jobs performance with improved levels of productivity and economic growth if the UK economy is to deliver prosperity for all.

Small and medium businesses are particularly confident of jobs growth

Businesses of all sizes expect to add new jobs in the coming 12 months. However, the pace of job creation is expected to be strongest among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A positive balance of +58% of SMEs expect to grow their workforces over the coming year compared with a balance of +32% of larger firms.

Exhibit 7: Positive balance of firms expecting workforce growth 2012-17 (%)

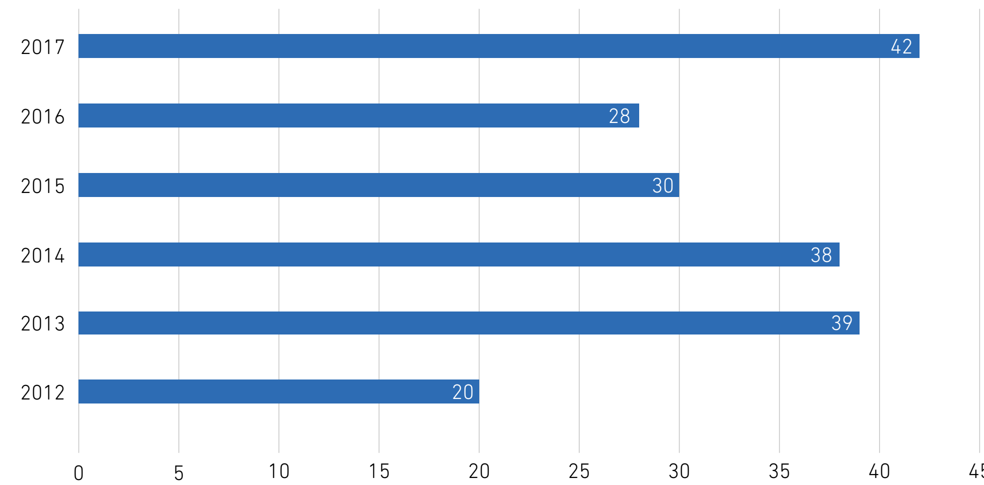
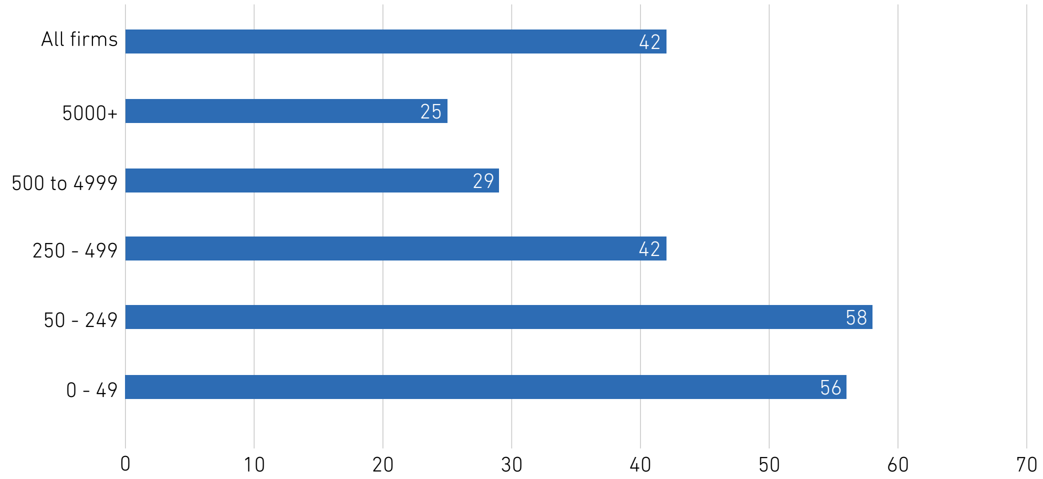


Exhibit 8: Positive balance of firms expecting workforce growth by size (%)



Among the very smallest firms with under 50 employees, a balance of more than half (+56%) expect to take on more employees in the coming 12 months (**Exhibit 8**). There are even stronger jobs growth expectations among businesses with 50-249 employees, with a balance of +58% expecting to add to their workforces. Employment growth among these businesses is an encouraging indicator for future health of the UK economy – but it can only be achieved if the right people with the right skills are available.

Permanent job openings look set to outstrip other forms of recruitment...

For the fifth year running our survey shows there will be growth in job opportunities for permanent roles (**Exhibit 9**). Nearly half of respondents (46%) expect their recruitment to permanent jobs to increase in the next 12 months. Only just over one in ten (11%) expect to cut back on their permanent staff. This gives a balance of +35% of businesses intending to increase the number of permanent jobs, almost double the +19% balance from our 2016 results.

Exhibit 9: Plans for permanent recruitment over the next 12 months (%)

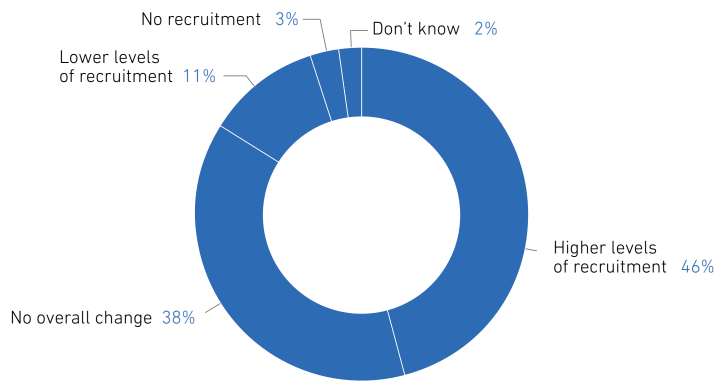
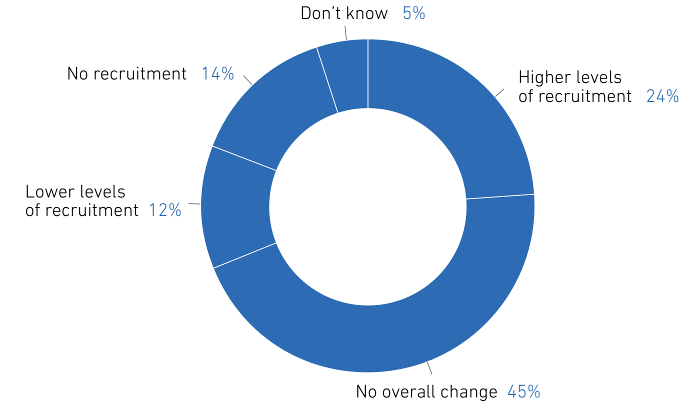


Exhibit 10: Plans for temporary recruitment in the next 12 months (%)



...but an upturn in temporary posts is also expected

In recent years the number of temporary job openings has remained fairly stable. Last year the balance of businesses expecting to take on more temporary employees was just +2%. While nearly half of respondents (45%) anticipate there being no change in their levels of hiring for temporary positions in the next 12 months (**Exhibit 10**), a balance of +12% this year expect to offer more temporary openings.

This increase is significant as temporary roles can offer a first step into the labour market for young people or those who have been out of work for an extended period. They can also, however, be a warning sign that some businesses expect short-term demand, but do not have the confidence to hire on a permanent basis.

The expansion in graduate openings seems set to continue (**Exhibit 11**). Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) are looking to increase their graduate hiring in the next 12 months, while only one business in 20 (5%) plans to cut back. Overall, a balance of +18% anticipate expanding their graduate recruitment in the next year, in line with the trends from our previous surveys. However, just over half of firms (53%) expect there to be no change in their levels of graduate recruitment.

Exhibit 11: Plans for graduate recruitment in the next 12 months (%)

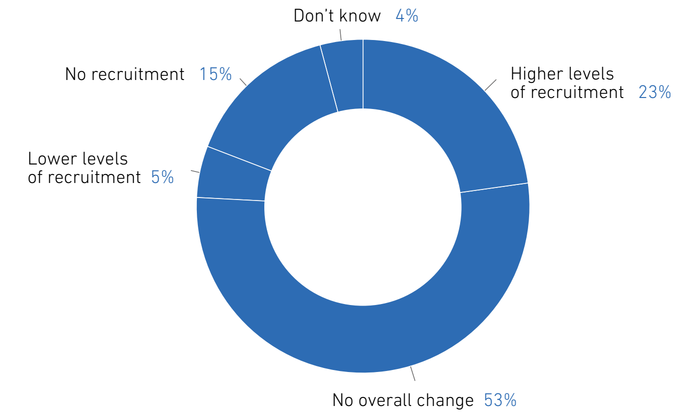
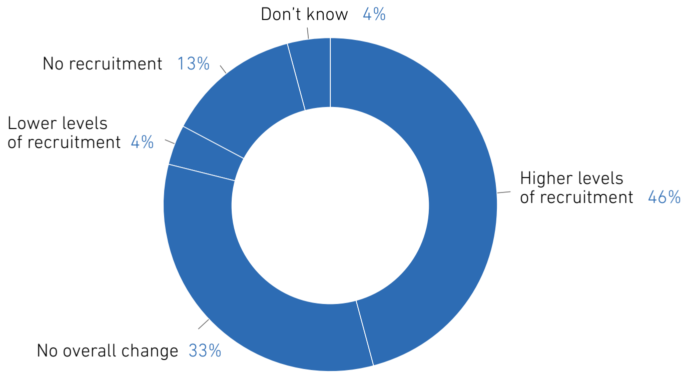


Exhibit 12: Plans for apprenticeship recruitment in the next 12 months (%)



Firms are keen to increase apprenticeship hiring next year

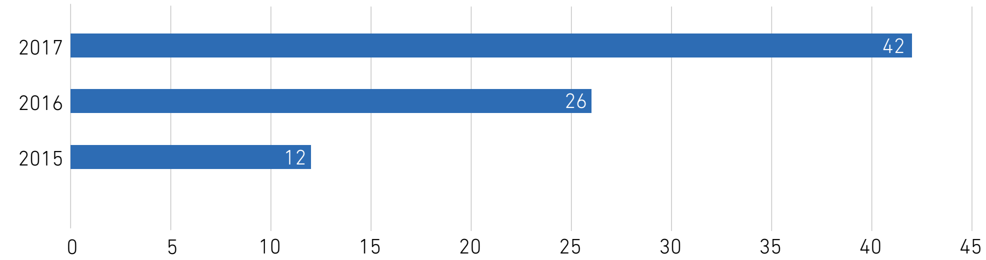
Apprenticeship provision has been undergoing major changes in recent years, most notably with introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017. Businesses greatly value the growing skills that apprentices can bring, and that is what has driven concerns that the design of the levy policy does not match the training and hiring needs of their business.

The CBI's annual education and skill survey asked companies in detail about the impact of the levy, and it showed that businesses are rethinking their approach to training.[10] Many will use the levy to invest in upskilling their workforce, with two thirds (63%) planning to reconfigure their existing training into apprenticeships.

This is the context for this year's results which highlight businesses' desire to expand the number of apprenticeship roles within their organisations (**Exhibit 12**). Nearly half of respondents (46%) expect to recruit more apprentices in the next 12 months and only 4% are planning to cut back.

This gives a positive balance of +42% of firms identifying apprenticeships as a key part of their recruitment and talent development strategies (**Exhibit 13**). Comparing this figure with previous years' results suggests continued growth in apprenticeship recruitment. Although positive, it remains to be seen how much of this growth will be realised, and how much is due to the increased profile of apprenticeships within companies following the introduction of the levy. When creating new programmes companies are frequently looking at how to use apprenticeships for existing staff rather than only for new hires.

Exhibit 13: Positive balance of apprenticeship recruitment intentions 2015-17 (%)



Introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017 was intended to trigger an increase in apprenticeship openings. However, the latest Department for Education data reveals a sharp decline in the number of apprenticeship starts since the levy was introduced.[11] The rushed implementation of the policy has inevitably caused disruption which may have affected numbers, but the underlying challenges for the levy policy are due to its design. Under the current levy system it is also difficult to disentangle new positions from existing roles and training that have been rebranded into apprenticeships. Our results reinforce that businesses are committed to apprenticeships and hope to reverse some of this year's decline in starts that can partly be attributed to companies adjusting to a new system. But the results also point to a mismatch with what the levy delivers. We saw the same appetite in our 2016 figures and yet apprenticeship starts went down. The government must work with business to get the system right.

The CBI has consistently called for more urgency and compromise from government to develop and improve the levy.[12] Our members tell us that more flexibility on how funds can be used would allow them to use their levy to offer opportunities that better match what businesses and apprentices need. Government should also consider allowing local 'pooling' of levy funds to support small and medium-sized firms to train at scale, and increase the transfer-limiting cap to allow firms to fund high-quality training in their supply chains. These proposals would allow much needed space for innovation and more locally-focused approaches. Businesses are ready and willing to help make these reforms work, but government will need to adopt an open approach to achieve progress.

CHAPTER 3

Businesses are walking a difficult line on pay

The UK labour market has performed well on a range of key measures, with employment at historic highs and unemployment at historic lows. But earnings have come under increasing pressure as inflation has risen during the past few months. Our results suggest that businesses believe inflationary pressure will ease in 2018 and that they will be looking to improve pay levels where they can over the coming year. But they face a range of pressures including coping with the costs arising from the national living wage and uncertainty about the future business environment.

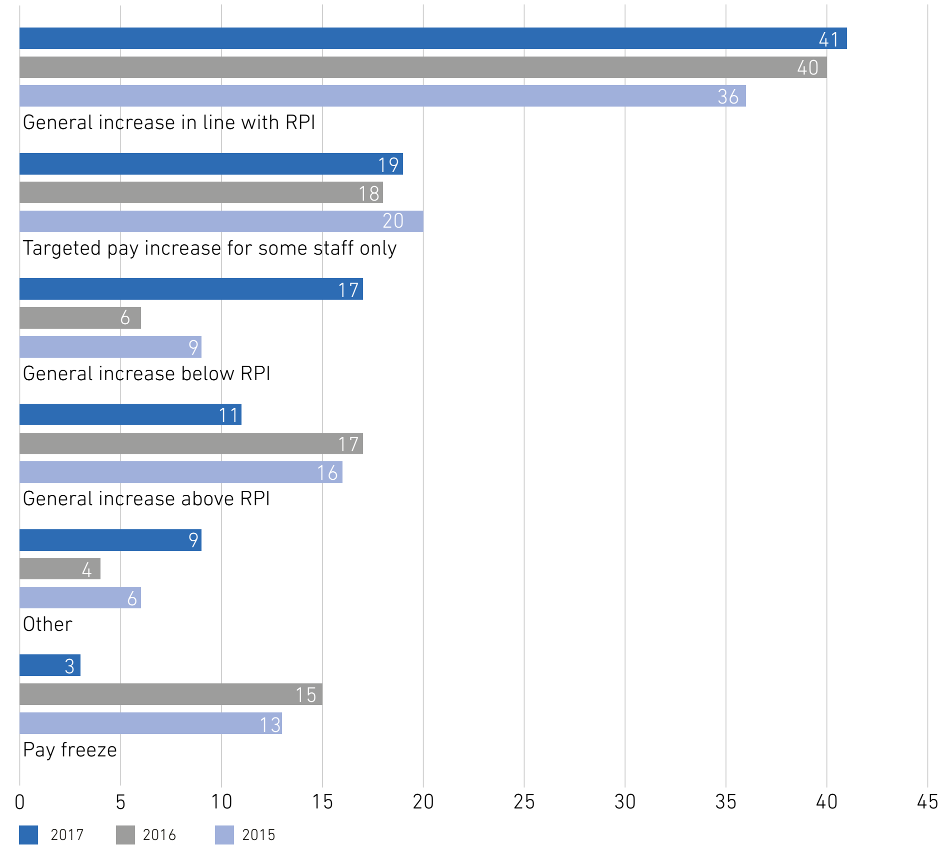
Key findings

- Half of respondents (52%) aim to raise pay for their employees in line with (or above) inflation in the coming year and only 3% are planning to freeze pay
- Over half of businesses (55%) are now affected by the national living wage, with actions to cope with the costs among those affected ranging from raising prices (21%) to increasing investment in training (32%) to boost the value added by employees
- Looking four years ahead, a quarter (25%) of respondents affected are expecting to restructure their business models while nearly a third (30%) intend to increase automation.

UK firms are balancing pay against cost pressures and economic uncertainty

Taking a steady approach to pay has helped UK businesses to generate jobs and economic growth since the 2008-09 downturn. The results of our 2017 survey (**Exhibit 14**) indicate that more than half of businesses (52%) are seeking to raise pay in line with inflation as measured by RPI (41%) or to exceed it (11%). This is lower than the previous year, when 57% planned to match or surpass RPI inflation. This is likely to be because of the short-term uptick in inflation which means that keeping pace with inflation in 2017/18 is more expensive than doing so in 2016/17.[13] This would support the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee's expectation that average private sector pay growth will head towards 3% in 2018.[14]

Exhibit 14: Firms' approach to their next pay review (%)



Encouragingly, the proportion of firms looking to freeze pay has fallen sharply (to 3%). And just under one in five firms (19%) will be targeting pay rises on particular groups of staff. With limited resources, these businesses feel that they need to focus pay increases on areas of the business where they are likely to see most return on investment.

Businesses are having to balance a range of different pressures on their paybills, ranging from the Apprenticeship Levy to the costs of meeting past pension commitments.[15] Future rising costs of pensions auto enrolment will also add pressure, with minimum employer contributions set to rise threefold by April 2019.

55%

Businesses now affected by the national living wage

Increases in the NLW are an additional challenge for a growing number of businesses

The CBI supports the government's objective of delivering a high-wage economy which boosts prosperity and raises living standards. But it is important to recognise that the national living wage (NLW) is an unprecedented and untested intervention in he UK labour market.

The NLW has changed the pay landscape since its introduction in April 2016. With the wage increasing annually, on a trajectory to reach 60% of median earnings by 2020, more and more businesses are falling under its remit. Last year half of all businesses (50%) reported they were affected by the NLW.[16] This year our survey shows the proportion affected has jumped to 55% of respondents.

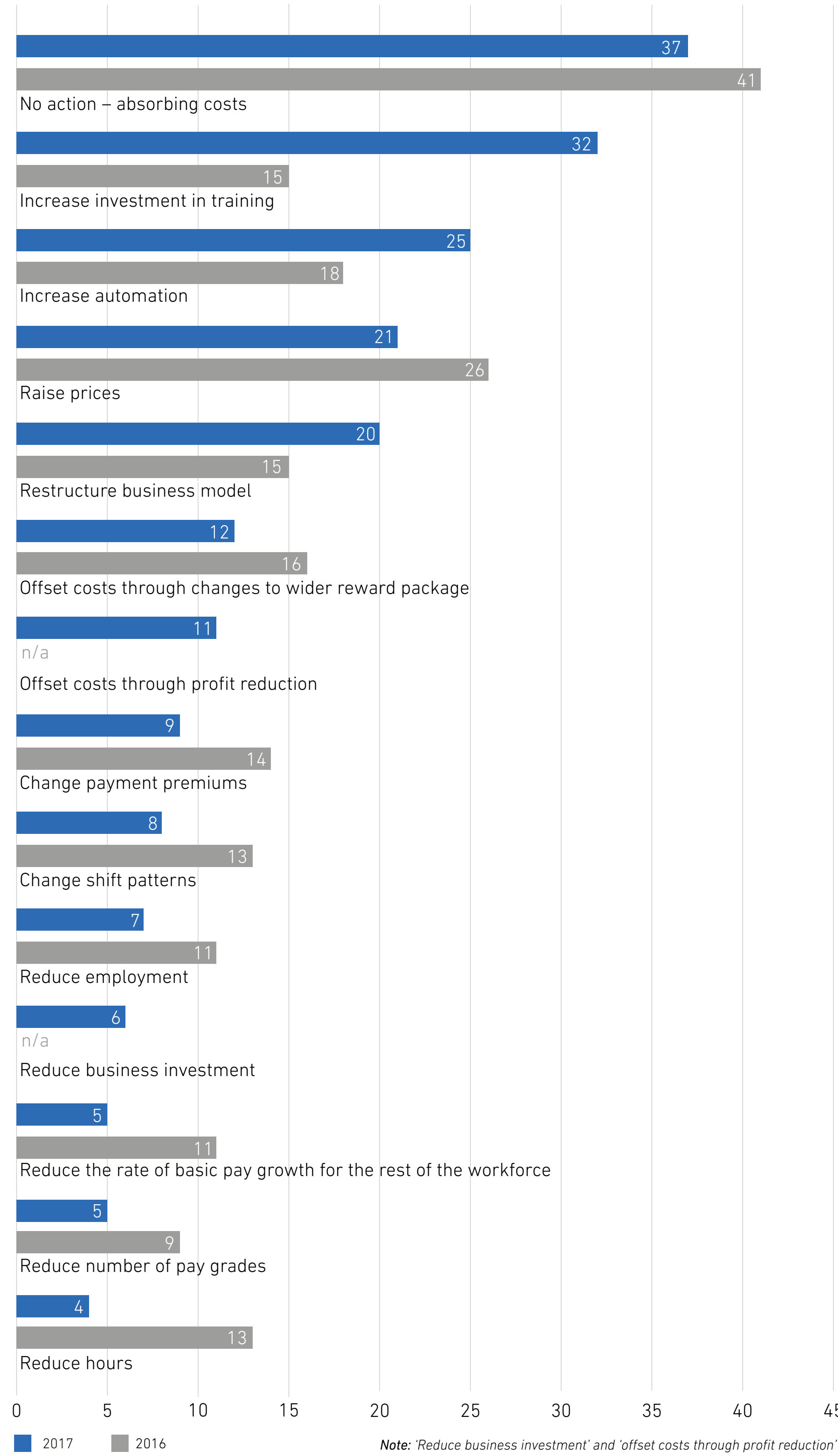
...and firms are having to devise new responses to the rising costs

Businesses are adopting varied responses to the NLW (**Exhibit 15**). Just under two in five respondents (37%) are currently absorbing the extra costs without taking other action. As the bite of the NLW increases, however, fewer and fewer businesses can take this approach.

One in five firms (21%) is raising prices and a similar proportion (20%) are restructuring their business models. Close to a third of respondents (32%) are also investing more in training. This is a notable increase on the results from 2016 and indicates that businesses are keen to invest more in their existing workforce to upskill them – raising productivity and boosting value added.

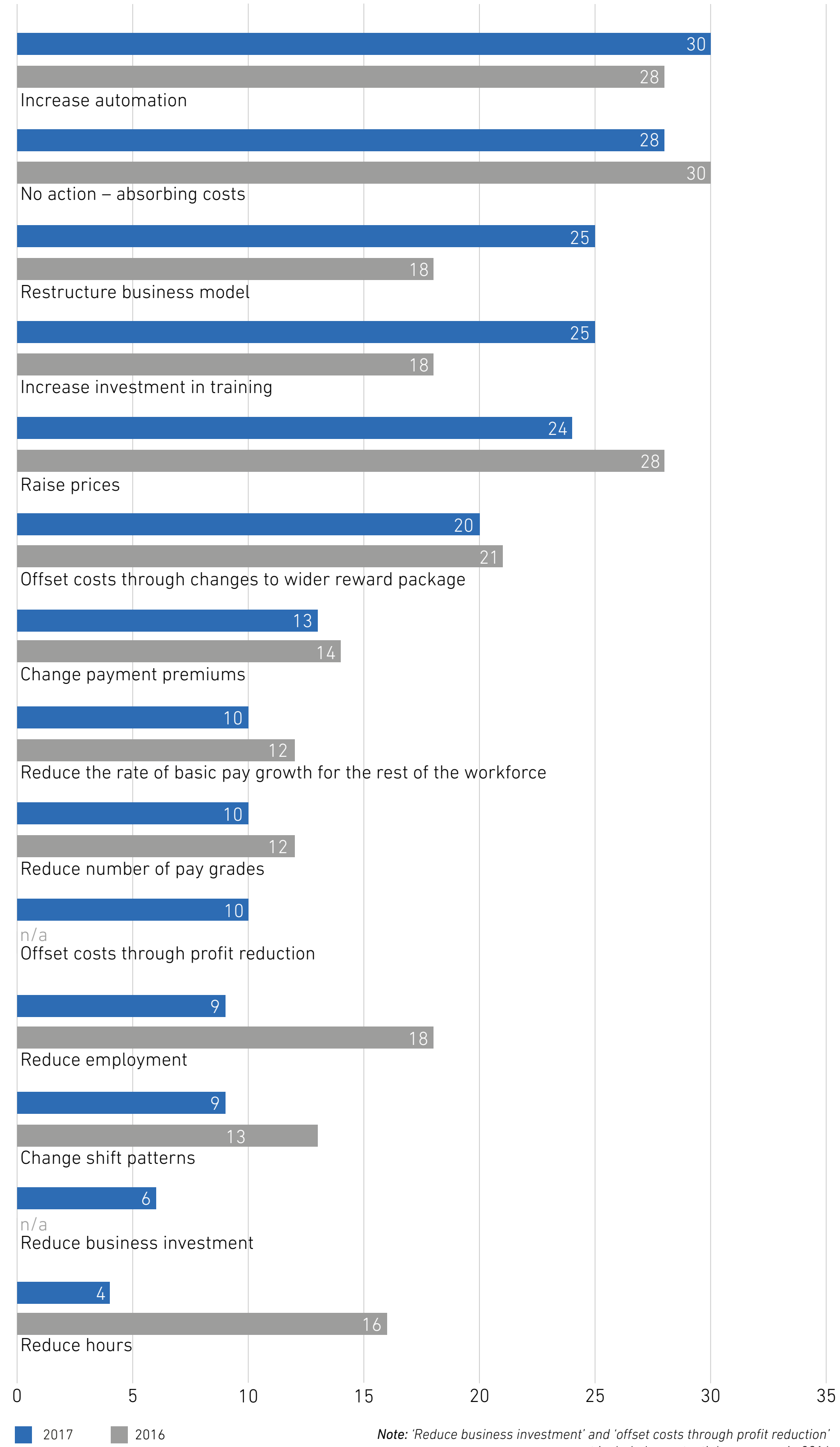
In a similar spirit, one in four (25%) is increasing automation. A reduced labour input in lower paying sectors was an expected impact of the NLW. These results suggest that we are starting to see that. This makes the UK's job creation performance and skills system all the more important to ensure that everyone benefits from the policy rather than creating winners and losers. Other responses include offsetting costs through changes to the wider reward package (12%) and reduced profits (11%).

Exhibit 15: Response to the introduction of the NLW 2016-17 (% of those affected)



***Note:** 'Reduce business investment' and 'offset costs through profit reduction' were not included as potential responses in 2016*

Exhibit 16: Planned response to the NLW in next four years (% of those affected)



Note: 'Reduce business investment' and 'offset costs through profit reduction' were not included as potential responses in 2016

Future increases in the NLW need to reflect economic circumstances

In four years' time, the proportion of businesses expecting to be affected by the NLW rises further to nearly three in five organisations (57%). For organisations with over 250 employees, the figure rises to just under two thirds (65%) of firms.

As the bite of the NLW increases, the scope for fully absorbing the costs without taking other action diminishes (**Exhibit 16**). Only just over one quarter (28%) of affected businesses plan to absorb the costs in the next four years, down from well over a third (37%) currently. Three in ten firms expect to increase automation (30%) and a quarter of respondents will be increasing investment in training (25%). The same proportion (25%) intend to restructure their business models to adapt. Just under a quarter of firms (24%) report plans to raise prices in response to the NLW, but this rises to a third of respondents (33%) among medium-sized businesses. The CBI and its members share the government's ambition to deliver a high-wage economy. However, balancing a rising wage against affordability, employment and business growth is something that the CBI has always said we need to get right, and this is the role of the Low Pay Commission.[17]

The NLW is an unprecedented and untested intervention in the UK labour market – we must be cautious and ensure that we balance the rising wage against affordability, employment, and business growth.

CHAPTER 4

Businesses are concerned that the UK labour market is becoming less competitive

The UK has long been an attractive place to invest, employ people, and do business, and its labour market is a key reason for this. But uncertainty around the UK's future relationship with the EU and a lack of clarity about the future business environment are causing firms increasing concern. The sooner businesses can have more clarity the better, and employers want to be reassured they will be able to access the people, skills and talent they need for the future.

Key findings

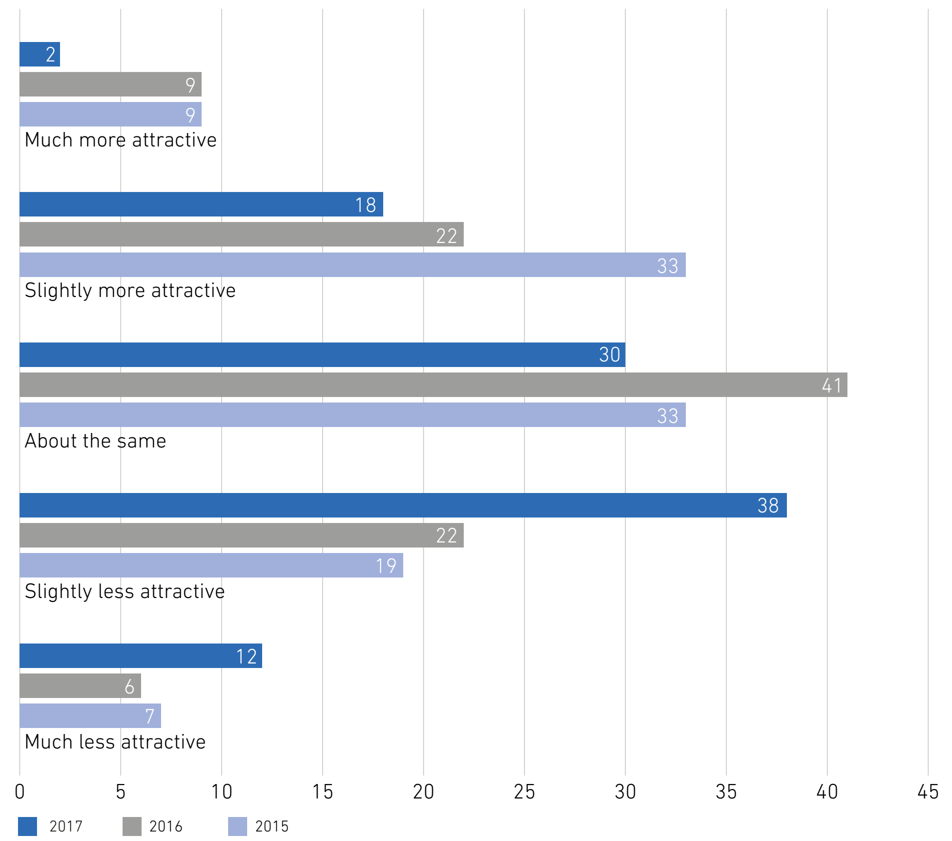
- Half of UK businesses (50%) consider that the UK has become a less attractive place to invest and do business over the past five years
- Nearly two thirds (63%) of businesses currently believe that the UK will become a less attractive location over the next five years, with fewer than one in five (19%) expecting it to become a more attractive location
- The main current threats to the UK labour market are skills gaps (79%), access to labour supply (49%) and access to highly skilled migrants (43%), and businesses are not optimistic that these threats will be tackled effectively in the years ahead.

Uncertainty is affecting the UK's attraction as a place to employ people and do business...

In 2015, more than two in five businesses (42%) believed that the UK had become a more attractive place to invest, employ people, and do business over the past five years (**Exhibit 17**). At that time only 26% of respondents felt that the UK had become less attractive, leading to a positive balance score of +16%. In 2016, as uncertainty rose in the wake of the UK's decision to leave the EU, the balance of firms reporting that the UK had become a more attractive location fell to +3%.

This year's results show increasing levels of concern across business. While one in five firms (20%) believes that the UK has become a more attractive business location over the past five years, half of respondents (50%) think it has become less attractive. This shifts the balance score to a negative -30%.

Exhibit 17: The UK as a place to invest/do business over the past five years (%)

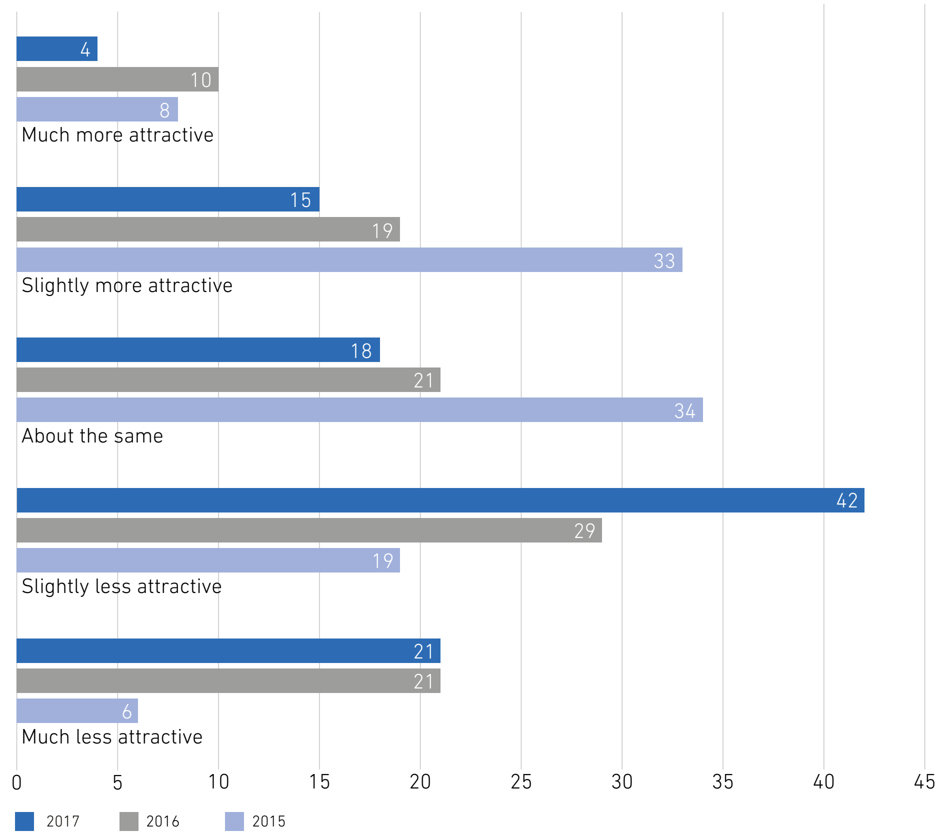


...and businesses are worried that this trend will continue

Looking ahead five years, a clear majority of our respondents currently believe the UK will become a less attractive location in which to invest and do business (**Exhibit 18, page 28**). Nearly two thirds of firms (63%) expect the UK to be a less attractive business location, with just over a fifth (21%) thinking that the UK will be much less attractive in five years' time. In 2016 the balance of expectations about the future attractions of the UK stood at -21% and the balance has fallen further in 2017 to -44%.

These results highlight the need for clarity about our future trading relationships and in particular about the ability of firms in the UK to access the people and skills that they need. Uncertainty acts as a serious obstacle to investment planning and other business decisions essential for future growth.

Exhibit 18: The UK as a place to invest/do business in five years' time (%)

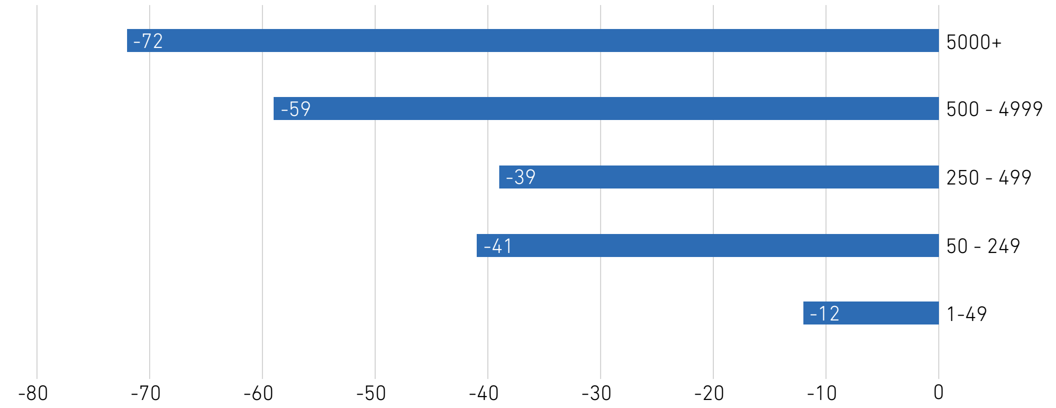


The problem of uncertainty affects the outlook of businesses in every part of the UK. Expectations about the attractions of the UK as a business location in five years' time range from a negative balance of -35% among those operating in the north west to one of -78% among businesses operating in Northern Ireland.

Concerns are most widespread among our largest firms

Looking at the results across different sized firms (**Exhibit 19**) shows worries about future labour market attractiveness are most widespread among the largest businesses. These firms tend to be the most involved in trade across the EU. Among firms employing over 5,000 people, three quarters (76%) consider the UK is likely to be a less attractive place to invest and do businesses in five years' time and only 4% think it will become more attractive. This gives a worryingly negative balance score of -72%. Smaller firms are relatively more optimistic about UK attractiveness over the next five years. But even among those with fewer than 50 employees a balance of -12% believe that the UK will become less attractive over this period.

Exhibit 19: The UK as a place to invest/do business in five years' time (% balance by size)

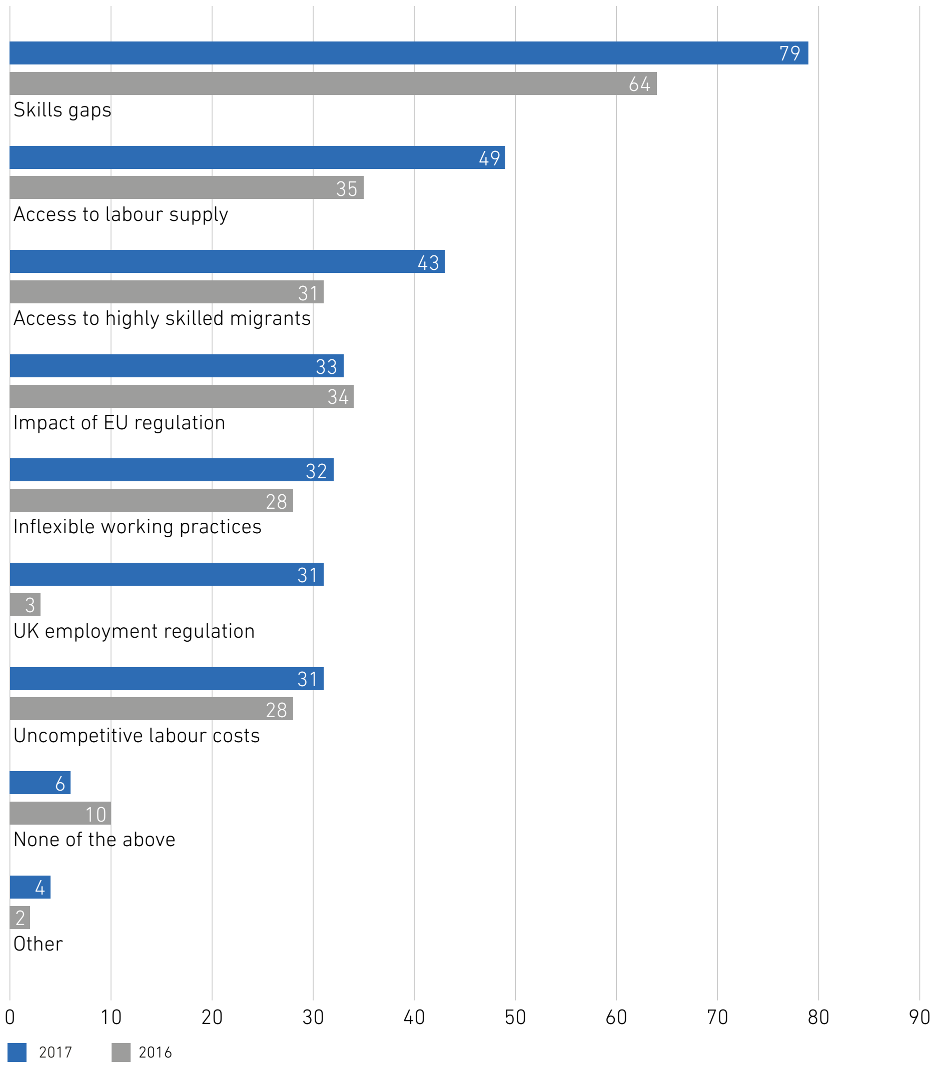


Businesses see people and skills challenges as the biggest threats to competitiveness...

We asked respondents to identify what they see as the current threats to the UK's competitiveness as a place to employ people (**Exhibit 20, page 30**). The biggest worries are over access to people and skills, and levels of concern on these issues have intensified since last year.

Skills gaps are the single most prominent worry facing businesses, with nearly four in five (79%) respondents highlighting it as a current threat to UK labour market competitiveness. This has increased from under two third (64%) in our 2016 results. Nearly half of respondents (49%) also identify access to labour supply as a key concern (up from 35% in 2016). And only a slightly smaller proportion (43%) report that they see inadequate access to highly skilled migrants as threatening UK competitiveness. Again, this is higher than in 2016 (31%). This demonstrates the impact that uncertainty about the UK's approach to EU migration is having already. The time it is taking to guarantee the rights of EU citizens working in the UK, for example, is already making it harder for UK firms to retain key staff and to fill shortage vacancies.

Exhibit 20: Current threats to UK labour market competitiveness (%)



Around a third of businesses point to regulation as a current threat to the UK's competitiveness as a place to employ people (33% identify the impact of EU regulation and 31% UK employment regulation in 2017). A similar proportion see uncompetitive labour costs as a current threat (31% in 2017, up from 28% last year). As we saw in Chapter 3, a range of factors apart from pay have served to push up labour costs in recent years. For many businesses, these rising costs pose a challenge to competitiveness, particularly for jobs in which new technologies cannot yet help to bridge the gap.

...and see these threats intensifying in the years ahead

Looking to threats to the UK's competitiveness in five years' time, the proportion of businesses identifying future threats has risen since 2016 on every measure.

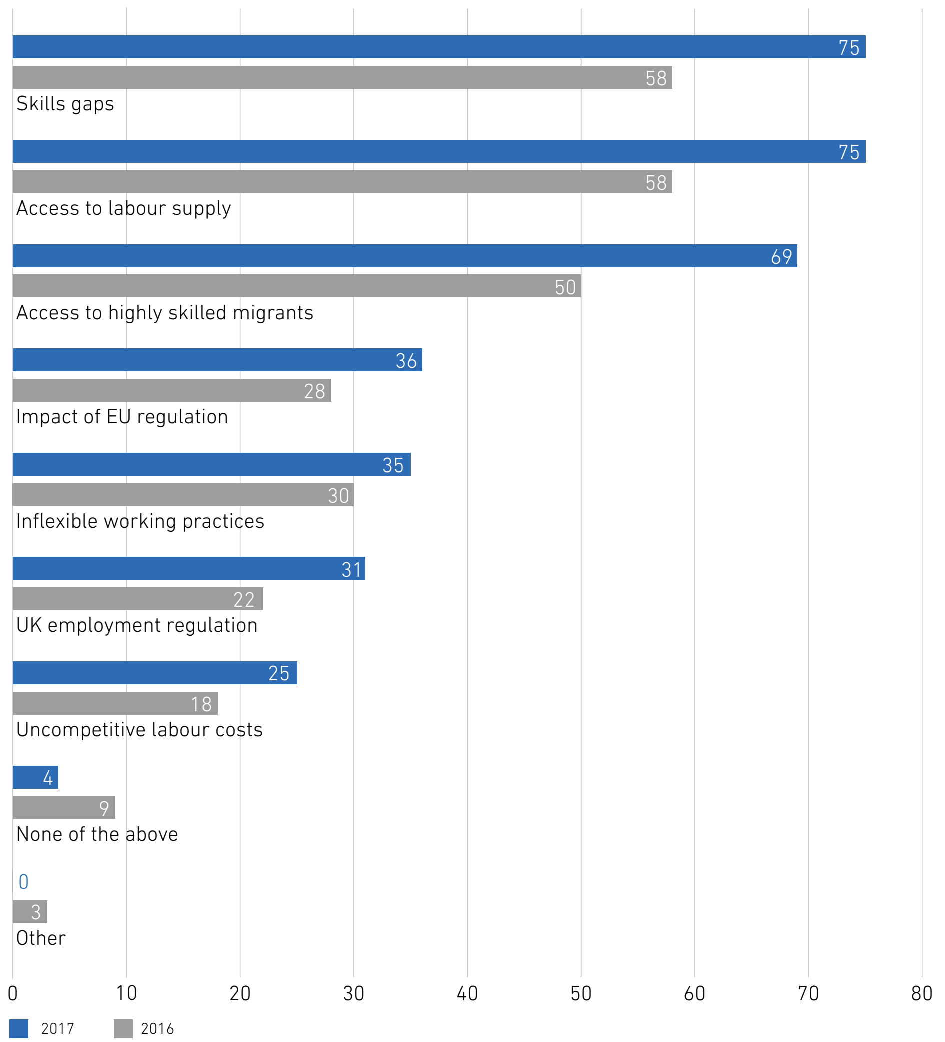
Concerns around having access to enough people with the right skills feature prominently when respondents were asked what threats they anticipate for the UK over the next five years (**Exhibit 21, page 32**). Three quarters of respondents highlight skills gaps (75%) and access to highly skilled migrants (75%) as key future threats, with over two thirds (69%) flagging access to labour supply. These figures are far higher than in 2016 and indicate that access to people and skills is weighing heavily on business minds at present. Uncertainty around arrangements post Brexit has added to doubts about the depth and breadth of the domestic skills base. Businesses need to be confident that our future immigration arrangements will enable them to bring in enough people with the right skills from abroad in the future. This means providing access to labour and technical skills – not just the 'brightest and best'. Getting systems right to achieve this could make a big difference in improving business assessments of the UK as a location for future investment.

More than one third of respondents also cite uncompetitive labour costs (36%) and UK employment regulation (35%) as concerns for the next five years. Once again, these are higher than the proportion of businesses identifying them as future threats in 2016 (28% and 30% respectively). Our results indicate that businesses are increasingly concerned about their ability to adapt to further rule changes. The government must therefore tread lightly if looking to make changes to the UK's employment law framework.

A quarter of respondents (25%) also indicate that regulation from Brussels is a concern. It is not yet clear what the future relationship between EU social policy and UK employment law will look like either during transition or after the UK has left the EU. While EU rules still apply, it will be important for the UK government to agree Brexit terms that allow us to maintain influence on the rules that affect us.

These results show rising levels of concern about the environment businesses will find themselves operating in during the years ahead. The need for steps to give clarity and to increase confidence about the future are becoming increasingly pressing.

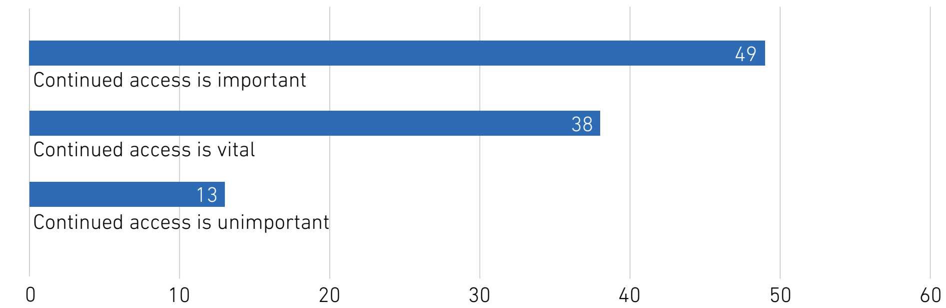
Exhibit 21: Threats to UK competitiveness in five years' time (%)



Businesses value access to EU labour...

The great majority of organisations (87%) taking part in our survey have workers from elsewhere in the EU as part of their workforce. Among these businesses, nearly nine in ten report that continued access to skills and labour from the EU is important (49%) or vital (38%) for their operations (**Exhibit 22**). This use of EU workers by such a high proportion of businesses contrasts with current users of the non-EEA migration system. In July 2017 there were only 34,000 organisations across the UK that held a Tier 2 sponsor license.[18] Therefore, if an employer sponsorship model like the current non-EEA system were to be applied to businesses that hire EU workers, it would have significant consequences for far more British firms. A different, more flexible system is needed to manage EU migration in the future.

Exhibit 22: Importance of access to skills and labour from the EU (% of respondents accessing workers from the EU)

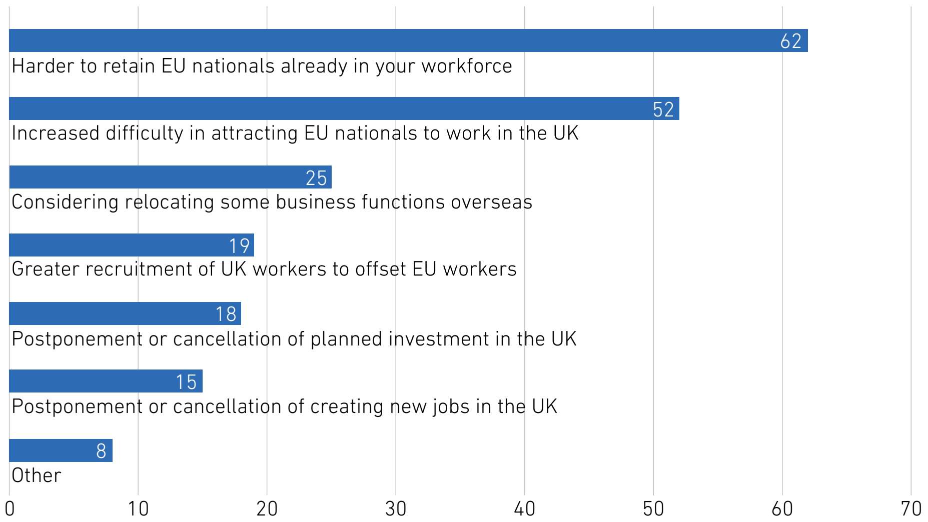


...and uncertainty around the future immigration system for EU nationals is already impacting UK firms

One of the most high-profile debates in the Brexit negotiations has been on the issue of citizens' rights – both for British citizens living and working in the EU, and for EU nationals in the UK. The CBI has consistently called on government and the EU's negotiators to prioritise an agreement in this area for the benefit of the people involved and for businesses.[19] There has also been a great deal of uncertainty around how the future immigration system will work for EU nationals and their employers in the aftermath of Brexit.

"The time it is taking to guarantee the rights of EU citizens working in the UK is already making it harder for UK firms to retain key staff and to fill shortage vacancies."

Exhibit 23: Impact of uncertainty around the future immigration system for EU nationals (% of those reporting an impact)



This uncertainty is having a range of impacts on businesses (**Exhibit 23**): over half of respondents to the 2017 survey (56%) report that their organisation has already been impacted by uncertainty around the future immigration system. Among these businesses, nearly two thirds (62%) are finding it harder to retain EU nationals in their workforces and over half (52%) are finding it increasingly difficult to attract EU nationals to work in the UK.[20] To overcome the problems, a quarter of affected firms (25%) are considering relocating some business functions out of the UK and nearly a fifth (18%) have already postponed or cancelled planned investment in the UK. These unwelcome responses again highlight the need for certainty about future arrangements.

Many of the businesses considering relocating some business functions have this as a contingency plan in the event that they will not be able to access the people they need after Brexit. The period between new rules being finalised and them coming into effect – the implementation period – must be at least as long as it would take a business to implement its contingency plan. If it is not, then decisions taken will be based on worst case scenarios rather than reality and will lead to more negative outcomes for the UK than is necessary.

CHAPTER 5

Diverse and inclusive workplaces can help businesses get the best from their people

Businesses are increasingly seeing policies fostering diversity and inclusion as an important route to unlocking productivity and the potential of their employees. The moral case for diversity is unanswerable, but the CBI is also a strong believer in the business case for diversity. It is therefore active in supporting members to overcome the barriers they face in developing more inclusive workplace practices.

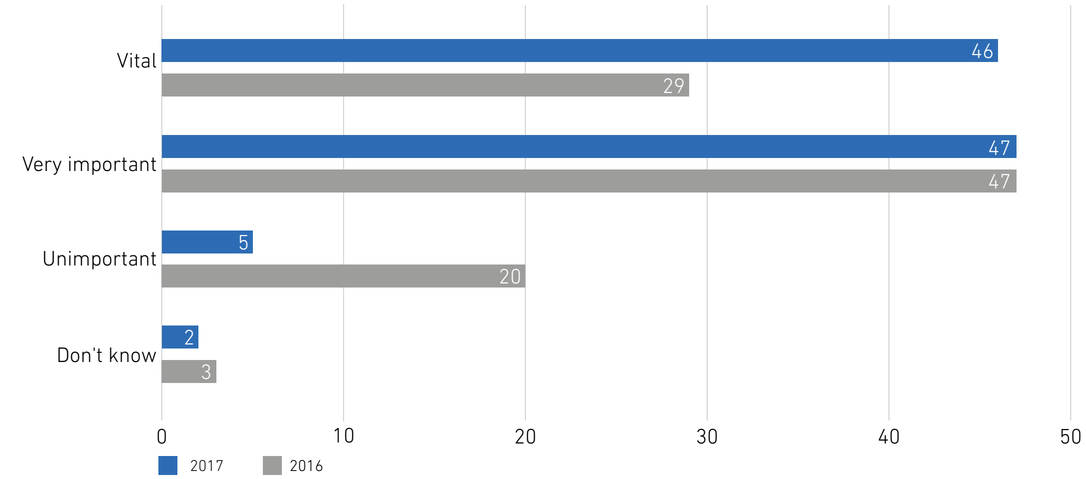
Key findings

- More than nine in ten respondents (93%) see achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce as important or vital to their future success, with seven in ten firms (70%) introducing or extending flexible working opportunities and two thirds (66%) investing in training for line managers
- Businesses identify the main benefits of inclusive workplaces as an increased ability to attract and retain people (52%) and increased skills and capabilities (50%)
- Among firms that have had to produce a gender pay gap report, just over six in ten respondents (62%) report that it has changed some aspect of their firm's diversity and inclusion strategy.

A record proportion of businesses recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace practices...

More than nine in ten respondents (93%) see achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce as important to their future success (**Exhibit 24**). Indeed, close to half (46%) see it as vital. In contrast, the number of respondents viewing a diverse workforce as unimportant has fallen to only one in twenty (5%) in the 2017 survey (down from 20% in 2016).

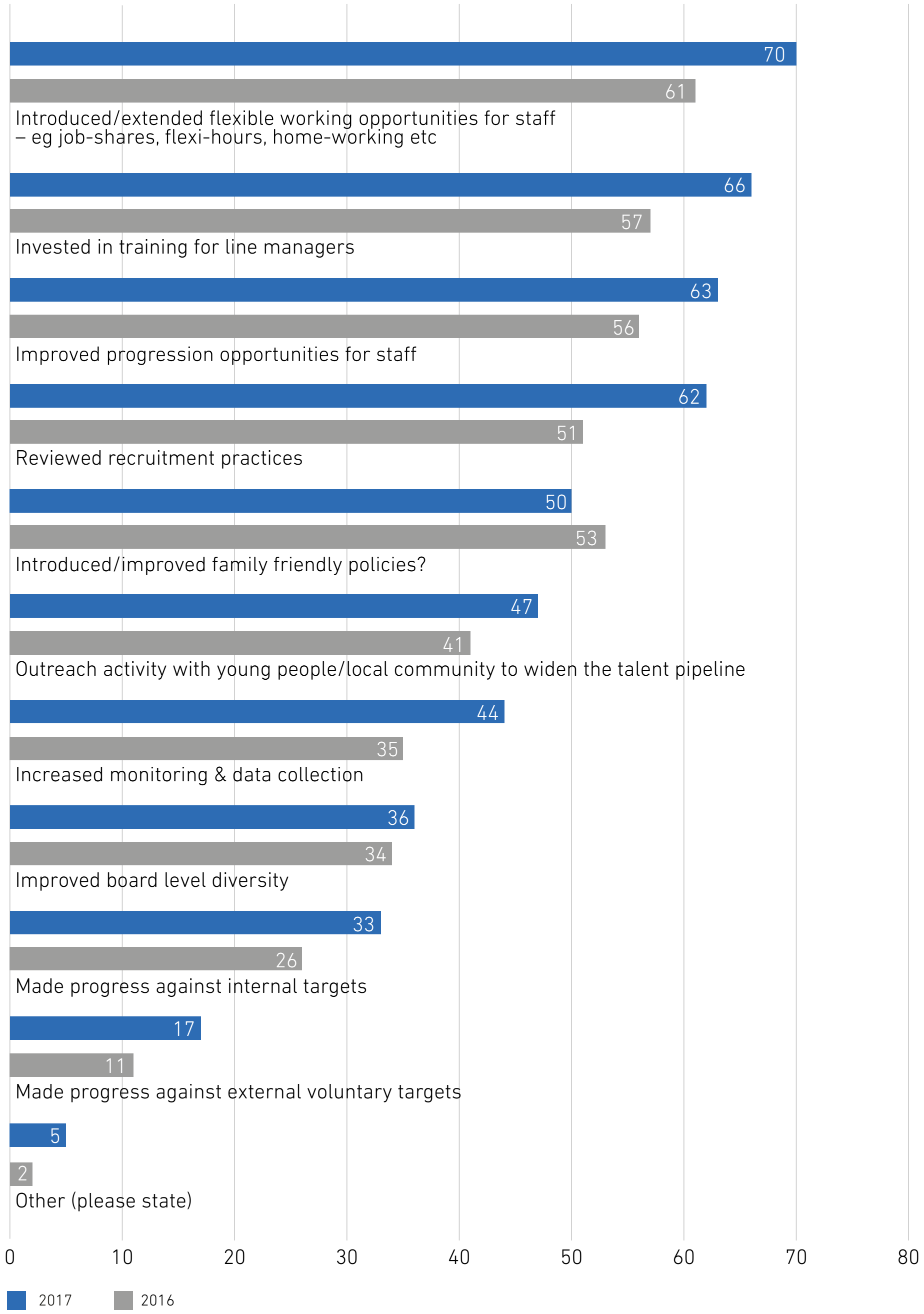
Exhibit 24: Importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce 2016-17 (%)



...and they are working hard to unlock them

More than nine in ten respondents (93%) report that they have taken action in the past five years to build more inclusive workplaces. Of those acting, seven in ten firms (70%) have introduced or extended flexible working opportunities and two thirds (66%) have invested in training for line managers (**Exhibit 25, page 38**). Almost as many have improved progression opportunities for staff (63%) and reviewed recruitment practices to ensure they are not inhibiting diversity (62%).

Exhibit 25: Steps taken to increase diversity in past five years (%)



On virtually every measure, the 2017 survey results show firms stepping up their action compared with our 2016 survey findings in the drive to implement diverse and inclusive practices at all levels of the business.

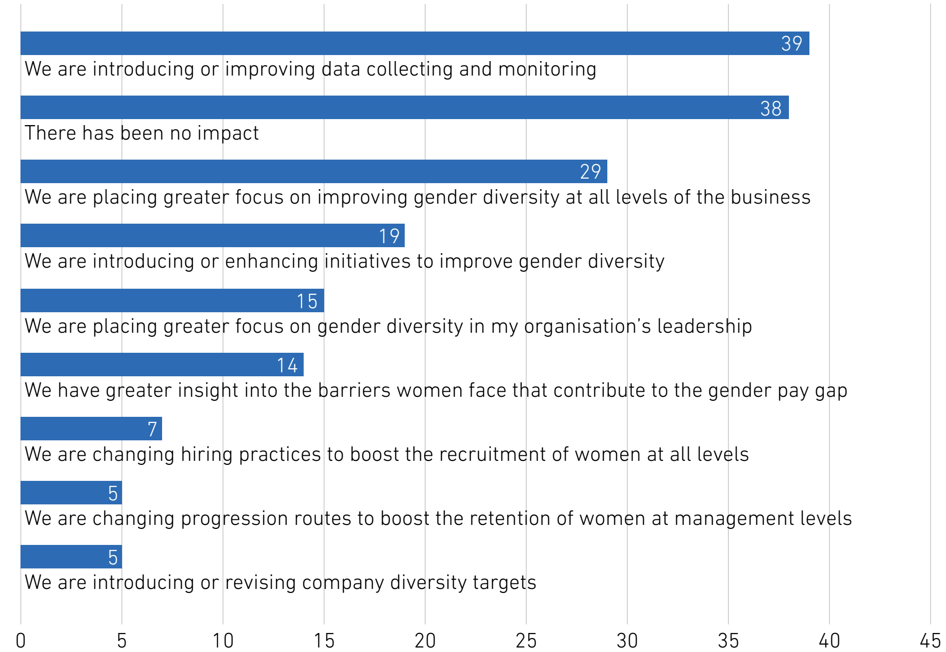
Gender pay gap reporting is triggering a further wave of changes

Gender pay gap reporting was introduced in April 2017. It requires employers in Great Britain with more than 250 staff to publish pay data segmented in several different ways to allow comparisons of gender pay within an organisation.

Two thirds of respondents (66%) report that they fall within the remit of gender pay gap reporting. Among the businesses covered, just over six in ten respondents (62%) report that the introduction of mandatory reporting has caused them to make changes to their firm's diversity and inclusion strategy.

The changes triggered by their experience of gender pay gap reporting take a variety of forms (**Exhibit 26**). Nearly, four in ten eligible businesses (39%) are introducing or improving data collecting and monitoring, while almost three in ten (29%) say they are placing greater focus on improving gender diversity at all levels of the business. Close to a fifth of these respondents (19%) are introducing or enhancing initiatives to improve gender diversity (such as mentoring programmes or access to flexible working) and only slightly fewer (15%) said they are placing greater focus on gender diversity in their firm's leadership. Almost as many (14%) say the exercise has given the business greater insight into the barriers women face.

Exhibit 26: Changes in response to the introduction of gender pay gap reporting (% eligible businesses)

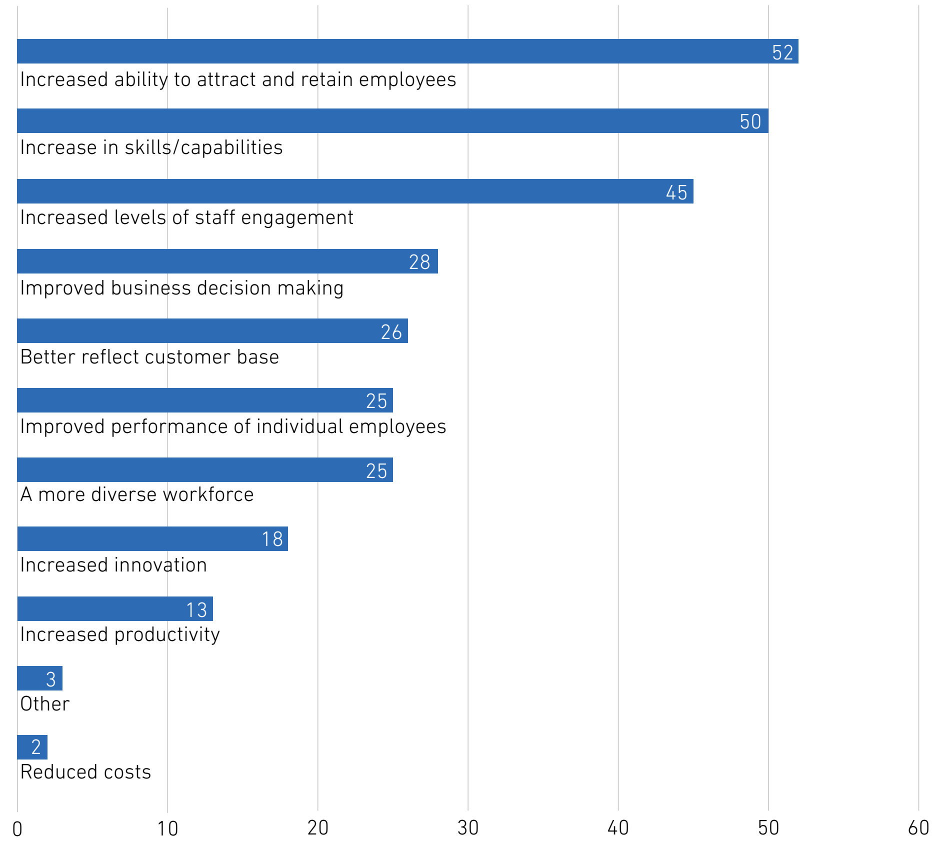


Inclusive workplace practices bring a variety of benefits...

We asked firms to indicate the main benefits they have seen from inclusive workplace practices (**Exhibit 27**). Almost all respondents (96%) say that they have seen some benefit. The most frequently cited benefit among these participant businesses is an increased ability to attract and retain employees (52%). Almost as many (50%) report an increase in skills and capabilities while 45% have experienced increased levels of staff engagement, with all the benefits that flow from this (see Chapter 7).

More than a quarter of those identifying benefits point to gains in the form of improved business decision-making (28%) and developing a workforce that better reflects their customer base (26%).

Exhibit 27: Main benefits of inclusive workplace practices (% of those identifying some benefit)

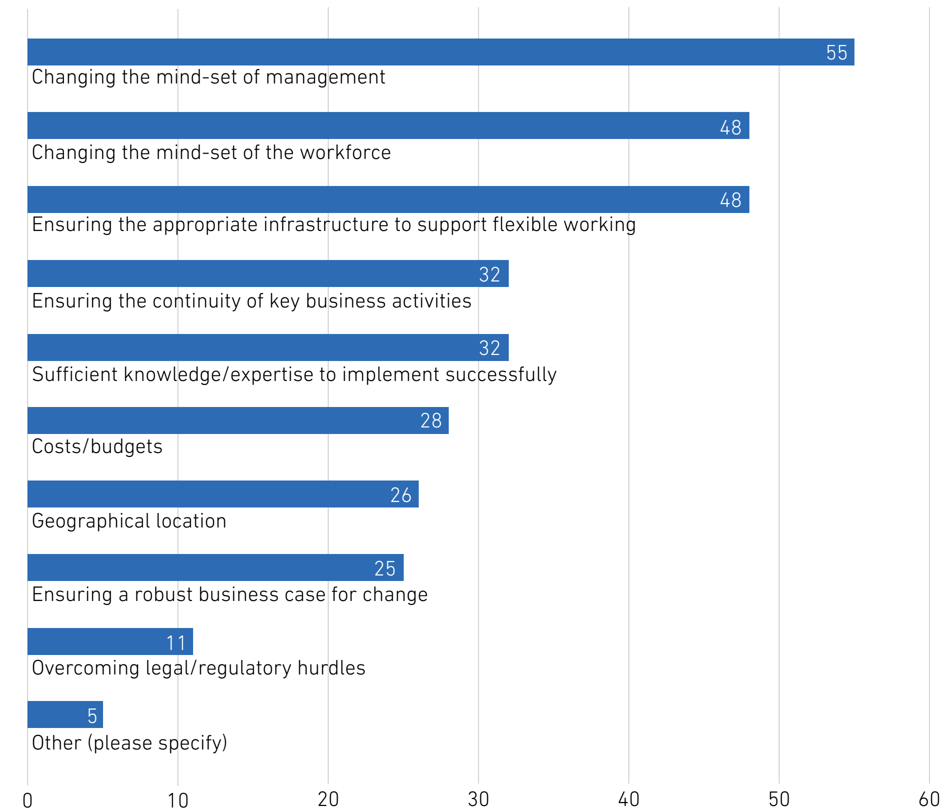


...but there are still obstacles to be overcome

Three quarters of respondents (75%) report that there are obstacles to implementing fully inclusive workplace practices – an increase from 67% in our 2016 survey. And the most commonly reported obstacles concern mind-sets (**Exhibit 28**). More than half (55%) see changing the mind-set of management as a key obstacle and only slightly fewer respondents cite changing the mind-set of the workforce as a barrier (48%). These figures have increased slightly from the 2016 results, signalling that there is still work to be done to change perceptions about the value of inclusive policies and to ensure that the business case is understood throughout organisations.

Nearly half of respondents (48%) also report that developing the appropriate infrastructure to facilitate flexible working can be a barrier. Although new systems and technologies can make flexible working more viable, this is not the equally the case across all occupations and sectors. Just under one third indicate that ensuring the continuity of key business activities is a challenge (32%). A similar proportion (32%) feel there are obstacles in terms of having sufficient knowledge and expertise within the organisation to implement initiatives successfully. The CBI works actively with its members to help them understand the business case for inclusive workplaces and will continue to hold events across the UK to raise awareness of this topic and share best practice.[21]

Exhibit 28: Obstacles to more inclusive workplace practices (%)



CHAPTER 6

Businesses want a labour market that is both flexible and fair

The UK's flexible labour market has been a great strength of our economy, underpinning job creation, business investment and our competitiveness. These strengths cannot be taken for granted, so it is essential that flexibility is retained and enhanced. At the same time, businesses recognise the need for a proportionate, effective framework of labour market regulation. They believe that fairness and flexibility can be complementary characteristics rather than an increase in one leading to a decrease in the other. Employment tribunals have an important role to play in this, but businesses are concerned about the impact of removing tribunal fees.

Key findings

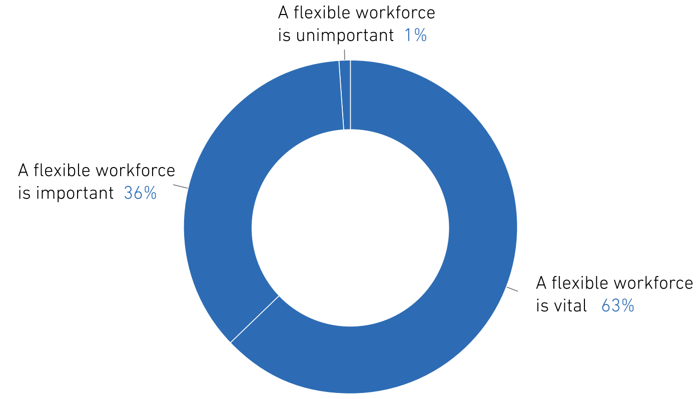
- Virtually every respondent business (99%) believes a flexible workforce is vital or important to competitiveness and the prospects for business investment and job creation
- There is broad recognition across business (by 95% of respondents) that there are ways in which UK labour market enforcement could be improved, with the main emphasis on increasing employers' knowledge of their responsibilities (63%)
- Nine in ten businesses (90%) think that removing employment tribunal fees is certain or likely to lead to an increase in weak, misguided, or vexatious claims.

UK businesses value the benefits of a flexible labour market...

The CBI believes that the UK labour market should be one that delivers prosperity for all – and flexibility is integral to its success. The UK has one of the most flexible labour markets in the world.[22] Flexible labour markets tend to enjoy higher employment rates and lower unemployment than those with more rigid approaches. And our research shows that over time they have better protected the labour share of national income and delivered more real-terms wage growth than more rigid systems.[23]

The overwhelming majority of businesses (99%) recognise the central importance of a flexible labour market to the success of the UK economy (**Exhibit 29**). Indeed, nearly two thirds (63%) consider a flexible workforce to be vital. This competitive advantage must be valued and protected.

Exhibit 29: Importance of a flexible workforce (%)



...but also recognise the need for an effective framework of regulatory enforcement

Businesses recognise that a flexible labour market works best when it runs alongside a fair and effective framework of employment rights. Effective enforcement mechanisms underpin a well-functioning labour market by upholding the employment rights of individuals and protecting compliant businesses from operating on an uneven playing field. Good enforcement should proactively target poor practices while minimising the burden on compliant businesses.[24]

Recognising the need for effective enforcement, the government has created a director of labour market enforcement tasked with setting the strategic direction of the enforcement bodies.[25] We asked businesses to identify how they felt that labour market enforcement could be improved to best effect (**Exhibit 30**).

Exhibit 30: Preferred strategies to improving enforcement of the UK labour market (%)

Increasing employers' knowledge of their responsibilities through a public information and good practice portal	63
Additional resource invested in proactive, intelligence-led enforcement	37
Publicly naming and shaming employers that breach employment rights	30
Extending, to all workers, the right to a written statement of terms to increase awareness of employment rights	29
Introducing a voluntary certification or kite-mark to identify suppliers' operating good practice in unlicensed high-risk sectors	23
Increasing fines for employers that fail to pay-out employment tribunals awards	19
Introducing joint and several liability for employment rights through supply chains	9
Extending licensing to more sectors or forms of working (e.g. online platforms)	8
None of the above	5
Other	2

Our survey results show businesses support progress in this area, with 95% of respondents identifying areas where improvements would be welcome. Greater awareness of employers' responsibilities is seen as by far the most important approach. Nearly two thirds of businesses (63%) report that creation of an information and good practice portal to increase employers' knowledge of their responsibilities would help improve enforcement, particularly in smaller companies without HR resource. More than a quarter (29%) think that providing more information to employees could also help, by extending to all workers the right to a written statement of terms.

Targeted action on enforcement also has its part to play. Over one third of businesses (37%) favour additional resource being made available to enable more proactive, intelligence-led enforcement. The vast majority of employers take their obligations to staff very seriously and therefore believe that robust enforcement should apply in those instances where this is not the case.

Three in ten respondents (30%) also say that public naming and shaming of employers that breach employment rights could improve enforcement. Support for these methods of improving enforcement comes from the recognition that one instance of a company not meeting their obligations damages the reputation of businesses collectively.

Very few respondents favour other approaches such as introducing joint liability for employment rights through supply chains (9%) or the extension of licensing (8%). These are viewed as unduly burdensome without necessarily unlocking a corresponding improvement in enforcement. Much more can be achieved through providing information in accessible forms and fostering improvements in employee relations.

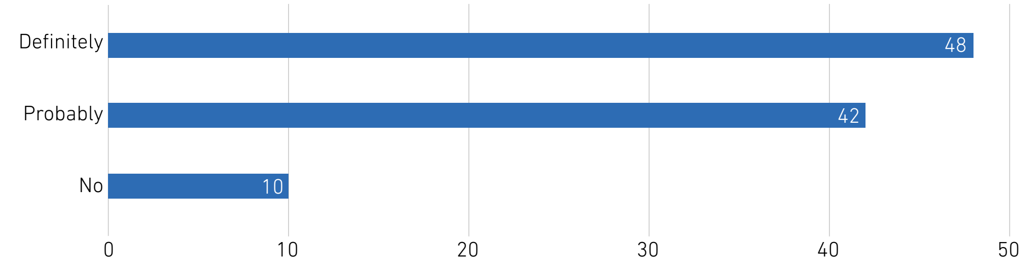
Businesses support new, proportionate tribunal fees replacing the flawed regime that was introduced in 2013

The CBI has long called for reform of the employment tribunal system to return it to the original vision of an easily accessible, informal, speedy and inexpensive system for people to enforce their rights. As part of this, the CBI believes that there is a role for proportionate fees to act as an incentive to ensure that going to tribunal is an option of last resort. But the excessive fees introduced in 2013 have acted as a barrier to justice for some.

Time will tell how the decision of the Supreme Court in the summer of 2017 to overturn the employment tribunal fees system works out in practice. But businesses are deeply concerned about the likely impact of removing fees from the tribunal system (**Exhibit 31**). Nearly half of respondents (48%) believe it will definitely lead to an increase in weak, misguided, or vexatious claims and over four in ten (42%) think it will probably do so. Just one in ten (10%) believes there will be no adverse consequences flowing from the decision.

These results highlight the extent of unease across business. Trends in claims and their nature will need to be monitored with care over the coming months to see if more needs to be done to avoid weak, misguided or vexatious employment tribunal claims becoming an excessive burden on business. This should be accompanied by serious consideration of a fair, proportionate fees regime that prioritises effective dispute resolution rather than revenue raising, thereby protecting access to the tribunal system and avoiding re-creating a barrier to justice.

Exhibit 31: Likelihood that the removal of tribunal fees will lead to a rise in weak, misguided, or vexatious claims (%)



Effective enforcement mechanisms underpin a well-functioning labour market by upholding the employment rights of individuals and protecting compliant businesses.

CHAPTER 7

Businesses prioritise employee engagement as central to success

It is people that make a business. Securing high levels of commitment so everyone applies their skills and talents to best effect is at the core of nearly all business success. Businesses are aware of the steps they need to take to foster and maintain high levels of engagement among employees and this is their top priority for the challenging year ahead.

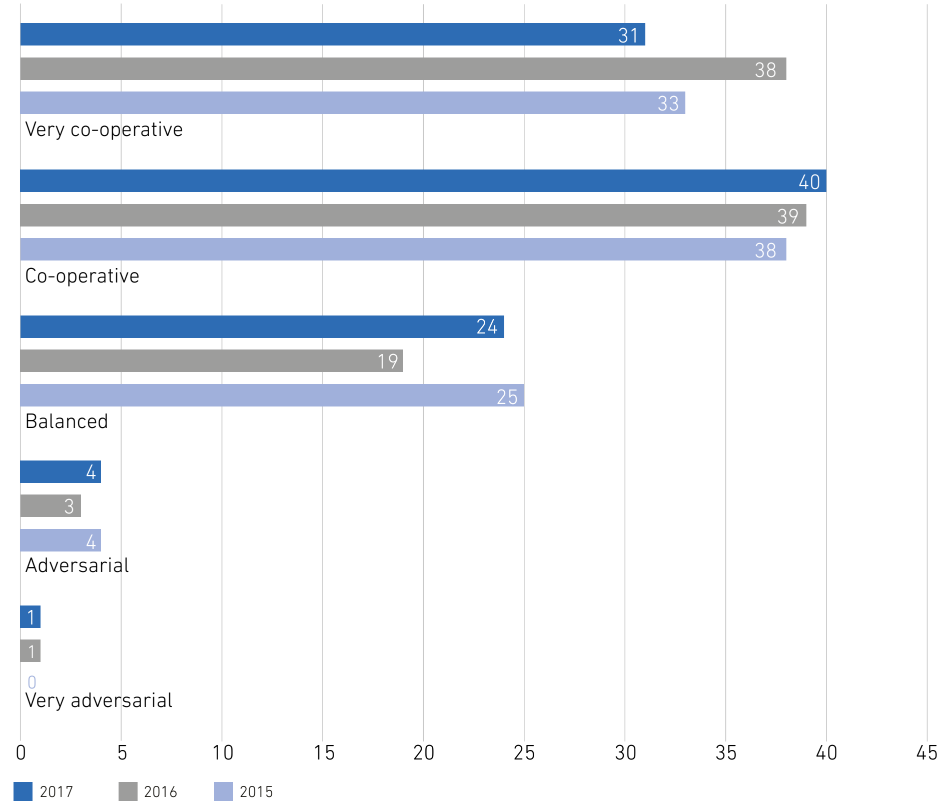
Key findings

- More than seven in ten (71%) respondents report co-operative employee relations currently and a similar proportion (72%) expect to maintain this over the next 12 months
- Effective line management is the most frequently cited driver of employee engagement (by 64%), with more than four in five respondents (83%) highlighting increased productivity and performance as a benefit of an engaged workforce
- Achieving high levels of employee engagement (46%), improving leadership skills (44%) and retaining talent (35%) will be the top workforce priorities for businesses in the coming year.

Firms are maintaining positive employee relations...

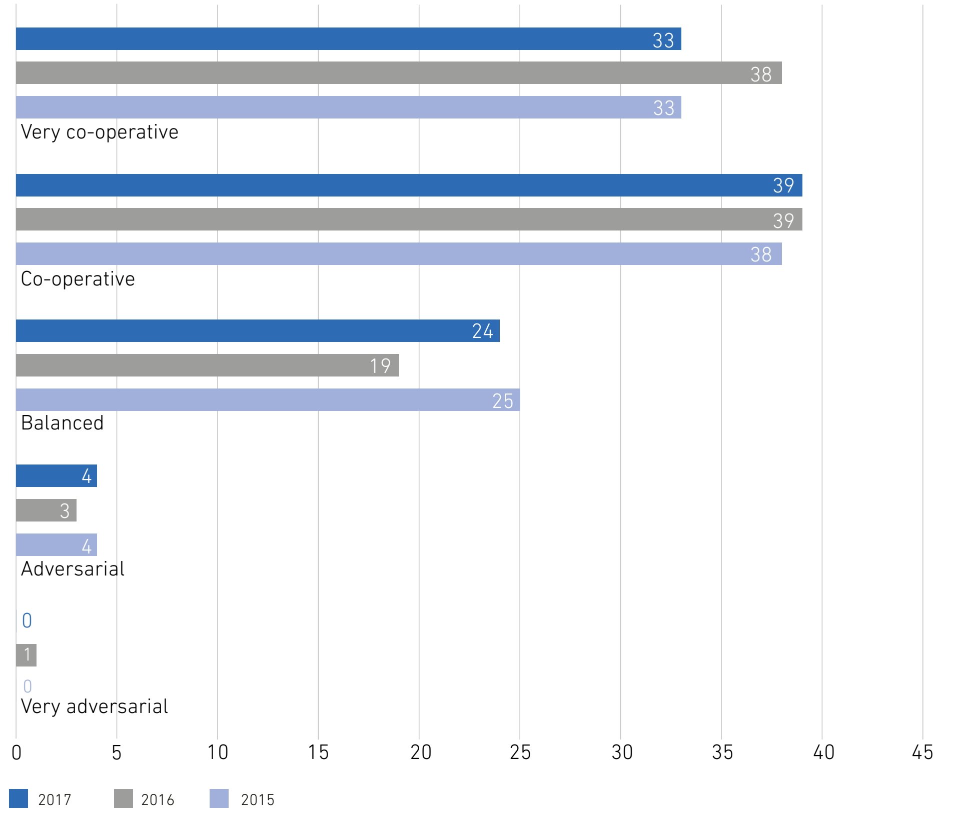
This year's survey results show a positive employee relations climate across British business (**Exhibit 32**). More than seven in ten respondents (71%) say their employee relations climate is co-operative or very co-operative. This builds on the positive track record of recent years.

Exhibit 32: Employee relations climate in the workplace (%)



Looking to the next 12 months, businesses believe they will be able to sustain this positive climate (**Exhibit 33, page 48**). More than seven in ten (72%) expect the employee relations climate in their organisation to be co-operative or better. At a time of rapid change and uncertainty, these are welcome findings.

Exhibit 33: Expected employee relations climate in the next year (%)

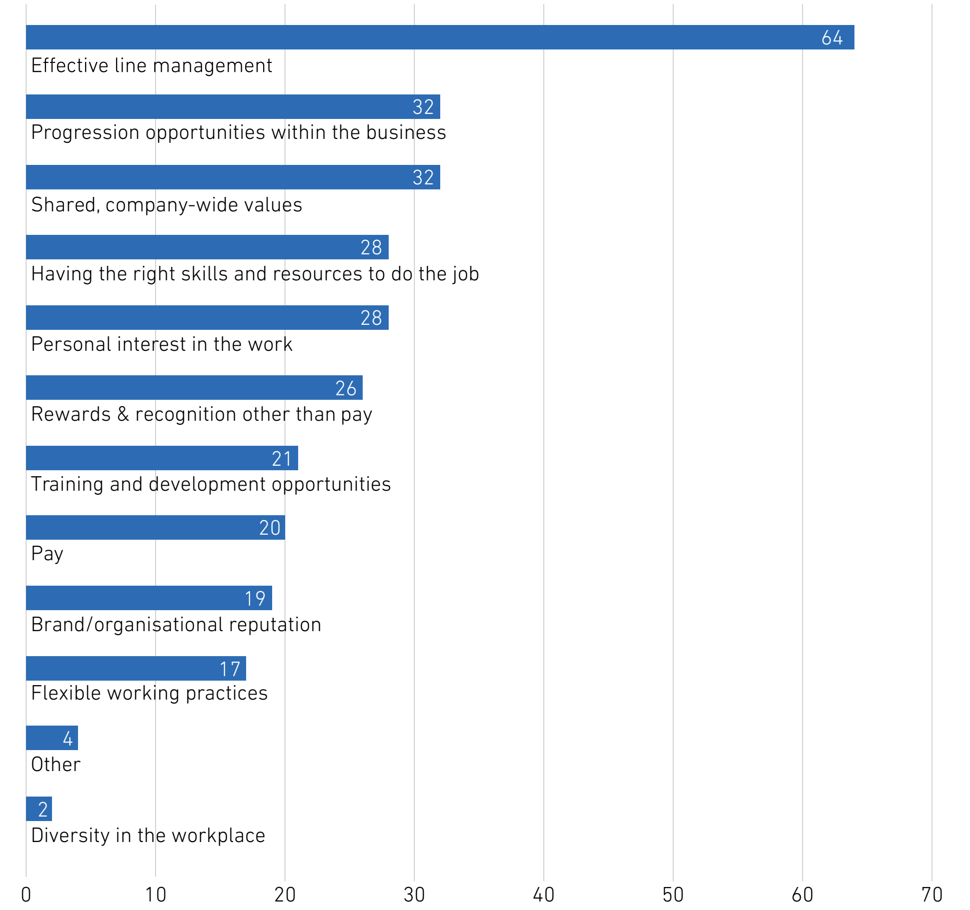


...and understand that line managers are key to sustaining this

We asked respondents to identify the three key drivers of employee engagement in their business (**Exhibit 34**). Nearly two thirds (64%) highlight effective line management as key to fostering employee engagement. Line managers act as the essential link within firms, bringing company policies to life and helping employees translate business priorities into practical action. As indicated by the CBI's 'Everyone's business' research into public perceptions of business, the way staff are treated has a major impact on business reputation.[26]

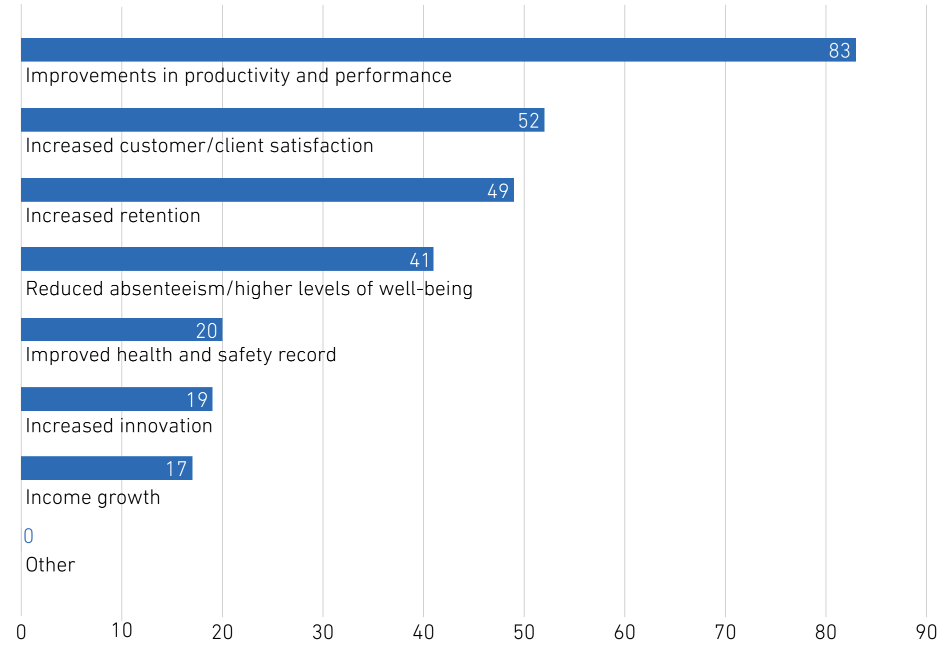
Just under a third of respondents highlight shared, company-wide values (32%) as a key driver. Chances for people to move up in their careers are also important, with a third of respondents identifying progression opportunities within the organisation (32%) as among key drivers of engagement. Having the right skills and resources to do the job (28%) and a personal interest in the work (28%) are also widely seen as drivers, enabling employees to achieve fulfilment in their roles.

Exhibit 34: Main drivers of employee engagement (%)



Maintaining positive employee relations is a priority for the majority of UK firms as they recognise the importance of their people.

Exhibit 35: Main benefits of engaged employees (% of those reporting benefits)



Businesses value the many benefits delivered by engaged employees...

We asked businesses to identify the benefits they see as flowing from engaged employees (**Exhibit 35**). In all, 96% were able to point to specific benefits.

More than eight in ten (83%) report improvements in productivity and performance, and over half (52%) of respondents highlight increased customer satisfaction. A similar proportion (49%) say that increased retention has flowed from employee engagement, while just over four in ten (41%) point to reduced absenteeism and higher levels of wellbeing.

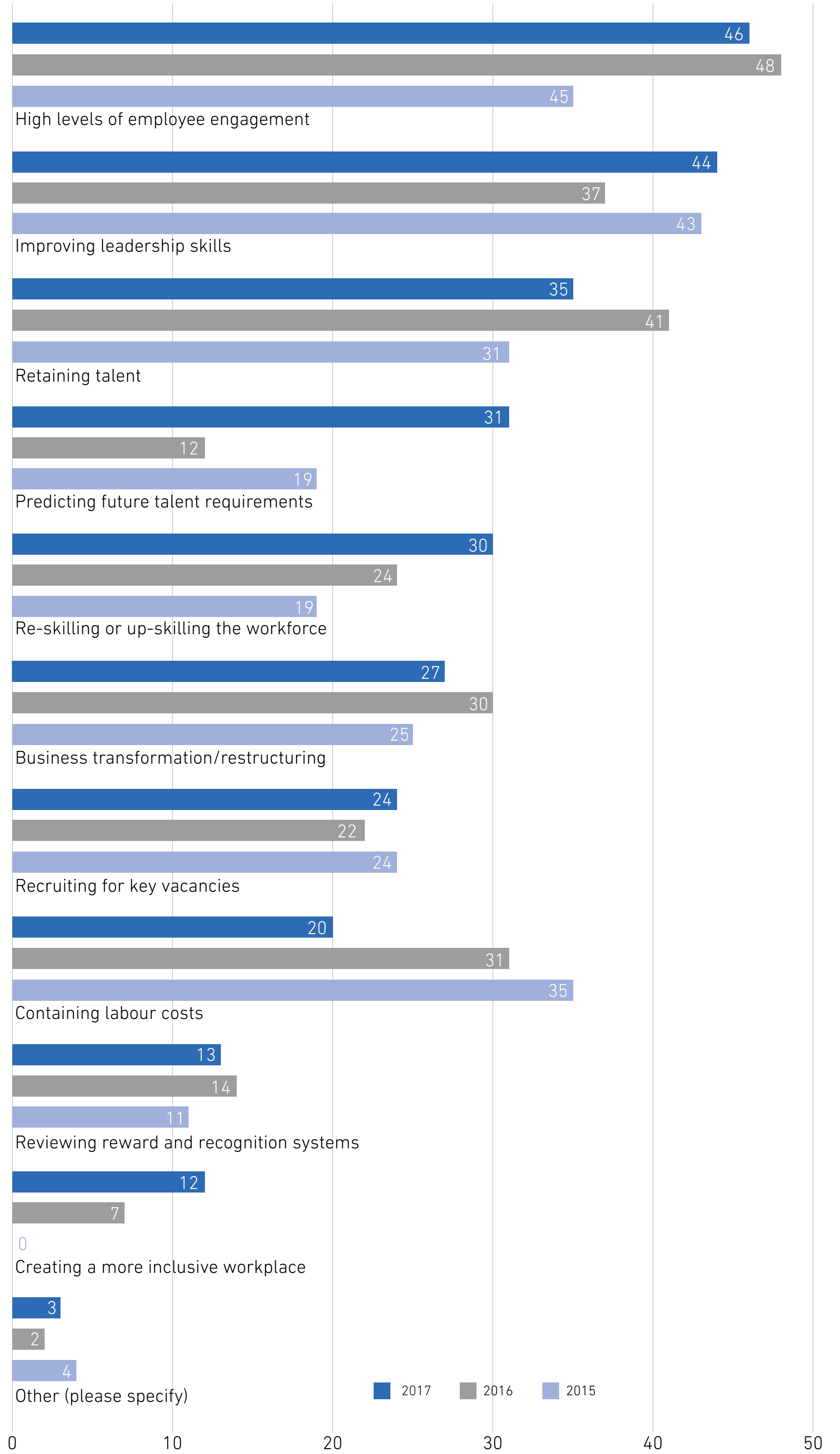
These results make clear the business case for seeking to achieve high levels of employee engagement. And that engagement will be all the more important in the period ahead when so many businesses will be facing rapid change in an uncertain environment.

...and will prioritise employee engagement and investing in their people over the next 12 months

We asked businesses to indicate their three top workforce priorities for the year ahead (**Exhibit 36, page 52**). In recent years achieving high levels of employee engagement and improving leadership skills have been the most frequently cited priorities. This year's results continue that trend. Nearly half of respondents (46%) will be prioritising achieving or maintaining high levels of employee engagement – showing the importance that businesses place on it. Only slightly fewer respondents (44%) say that they will be acting to improve leadership skills. These results reflect the close links between quality of leadership and levels of employee engagement.

Retaining existing talent (35%) is also a widespread priority and there is a notable increase in firms saying that they will be focusing on predicting future talent requirements (31%). This increase (from 12% in 2016) shows businesses feeling the need to take stock in the context of the uncertainty around access to people and skills in the wake of Brexit. In a similar spirit, close to a third (30%) will be making re-skilling or upskilling their workforces a leading priority in the year ahead.

Exhibit 36: Workplace priorities in the coming year (%)



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