



Department for
Business & Trade

DBT National Survey of UK Registered Businesses 2024

2024 Report

Published 14th August 2025

Contents

1. Executive Summary	5
1.1 About the National Survey of Registered Businesses (NSRB)	5
1.2 Overall context and main findings (<i>£500,000+ turnover businesses</i>)	5
1.3 Key findings by theme – (<i>£500,000+ turnover businesses</i>)	6
1.3.1 General exporting behaviours	6
1.3.2 Barriers to exporting	8
1.3.3 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)	8
1.3.4 Supply chains	9
1.3.5 Export knowledge and support	9
1.3.6 Expectations for growth and trade	10
1.3.7 Importing	10
1.3.8 Advertising and campaign metrics	10
2. Background	12
2.1 DBT's objectives	12
2.2 Context	12
2.2.1 Timeline of relevant events	12
2.2.2 EU Exit and future trade	13
2.2.3 COVID-19	14
2.2.4 Disruption across the world due to conflict	14
2.2.5 Economic instability and inflation	14
3. Survey methodology	16
3.1 The objectives of the NSRB	16
3.2 Sample and fieldwork design	17
3.3 Sample size and effective base sizes	18
3.4 Statistical significance	20
3.5 Segment definitions	21
4. Current and future exporting behaviours – (<i>£500,000+ turnover businesses</i>)	22
4.1 Current exporting behaviours	23
4.2 Exporting goods and services	27
4.3 Export change in the last 12 months	30
4.4 Active and passive exporting	31
4.5 Export markets	32

4.6	Future plans for exporting	33
5.	Barriers to exporting – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	35
5.1	Capabilities to focus on exporting	35
5.2	Barriers to exporting to core markets	37
5.3	Barriers to exporting in general	38
6.	Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	42
6.1	Knowledge of FTAs	43
6.2	Expected effects of FTAs	44
6.3	Information and support relating to FTAs	45
6.4	Experience of FTA benefits	46
7.	Supply Chains – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	49
7.1	Experiences with supply chains	49
7.2	Supply chain disruptions and resolutions	50
7.3	Having adequate supply chains to start and continue exporting	52
8.	Knowledge, information and support – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	53
8.1	Current knowledge about exporting	54
8.2	Knowledge about where to go for information, help and support	55
8.3	Interest in support and advice about exporting	58
8.4	Awareness and usage of DBT export services	59
8.5	Knowledge and skills gaps picked up throughout the survey	61
9.	Expectations for growth and trade – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	62
9.1	Business thinking on growth	62
9.2	Attitudes to exporting, and demand for UK products	63
9.3	Expectations for growth over the next 12 months	65
10.	Importing – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	67
10.1	Importing activity	67
10.2	Eligibility for FTA benefits	68
11.	Advertising and campaign metrics – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)	69
11.1	Awareness of advertising and information about exporting	71
11.2	‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ campaign recognition	75
11.3	UK Export Academy campaign and great.gov help and support pages recognition	78
11.4	DBT campaign effectiveness	80
11.5	Overall impact of campaign materials	81
12.	Findings within the <i>total</i> registered business population	83
12.1	Exporting behaviours	84
12.2	Barriers to exporting	85

12.3	Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)	86
12.4	Supply chains	86
12.5	Knowledge, information and support	87
12.6	Expectations for growth and trade	88
12.7	Advertising and Campaign metrics	89

About the authors

This report was written by Sarah Simms, Rebecca Steer, Lucie Lorida, Jessica Valins, Molly Bond and Sarah Frankenburg.

Thanks are given to Laura Byrne, David Johnson, Clara Minichiello and Lucy Henshall at DBT. Their support throughout the research has been invaluable.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 About the National Survey of Registered Businesses (NSRB)

The National Survey of Registered Businesses' exporting behaviours, attitudes and needs (NSRB) is commissioned by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). It monitors exporting behaviours, plans, capabilities, and attitudes of businesses across the UK. It is also used as a tool for evaluating the performance of DBT communication campaigns.

In total, 9 annual waves of the NSRB have been completed, commencing in 2015. This report is focused on the ninth and most recent wave of data, collected across 2024. In 2024, a total of 2,969 responses were collected from businesses throughout the year, split into 4 quarters, across 3 collection periods. Data for quarter 1 was collected between 8 March and 7 May. Data for quarter 2 was collected between 10 July and 28 August. Data for quarter 3 and quarter 4 was collected across an extended collection period between 26 September 2024 and 9 January 2025. This report focuses on findings from across the year, though some notable changes from quarter-to-quarter are highlighted where appropriate. Throughout the report, figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number and as such, breakdowns may not always sum to the expected total.

The primary focus of the NSRB is on businesses with an annual turnover of £500,000 or more. This is on the basis that these larger businesses can potentially generate high value exports at larger scale. Throughout most of this report, 'UK businesses' is referring only to those with a turnover of £500,000 or higher. This is not true of chapter 12, which reports on findings from the 'total business population'. The 'total business population' refers to the whole respondent population, incorporating businesses with a turnover of less than £500,000.

1.2 Overall context and main findings (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

Throughout 2024, businesses continued to face challenges. However, while pre-existing concerns around COVID-19, inflation and economic uncertainty, rising energy prices, and wars in Ukraine and the Middle East were still prominent, these were decreased compared to 2023, indicating a stabilisation of the business environment.

In July 2024 the UK held a general election, which led to a change in government. Data from quarter 1 (March to May) was collected under the previous government – all other data was collected under the Labour government elected on the 4th July 2024.

Exporting Behaviour: The proportion of businesses currently exporting has remained stable in 2024, see Figure 4.2. However, since 2021 there has been a downward trend in the proportion of businesses who have ever exported (45% in 2021 to 43% in 2022, 39% in 2023 and 38% in 2024), although the 2024 figure is not significantly different from levels seen between 2015 and 2020 (40% to 42%). Overall, reported exporting volumes and businesses' expectations for UK export growth were in line with 2023 figures. Nine in 10 (90%) businesses who had ever exported said they had exported to one of the 'core markets',¹ a decrease from 94% in 2023. Most businesses (85%) said they had exported to the EU, consistent with 2023.

¹ There were 5 overseas markets designated as 'core markets' at wave 9: the EU, the USA, the Gulf States, Australia and India and were unchanged from wave 8. The EU was included as a core market for the first time in wave 8. These markets were chosen at the start of the 2024 wave on the basis of strategic significance for UK trade.

Business Concerns: General concerns around COVID-19 decreased further in 2024 compared with 2023. Concerns about economic/inflationary pressure, costs of shipping, energy prices and industrial action were also all reduced compared with 2023. Businesses were also more optimistic about the demand for UK products and services around the world. However, concerns relating to the UK's exit from the EU continued to be prominent and were unchanged compared with 2023.

Exporting Barriers: In general, the majority of business capability measurements explored were consistent with 2023 figures. The exceptions were in reported staff capacity and staff skills to begin or continue exporting, both of which improved since 2023. Thinking about respondents' ability to export to core markets, issues relating to time and costs were seen as the greatest barriers, though both had decreased since 2022 when these questions were last asked.

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs): Findings relating to FTAs were consistent with 2023. Three quarters (75%) of businesses had heard of FTAs, although less than 1 in 5 (18%) reported any knowledge about them. Among businesses who have or could export ('Sustain', 'Reassure' and 'Promote' segments), 79% had heard of FTAs, with almost 1 in 4 (23%) knowing anything about them. Despite this, over 2 in 5 (45%) felt that FTAs would benefit their business (61% among current or previous exporters), and almost half (49%) felt FTAs would benefit their sector or industry (61% among current or previous exporters). Businesses reported low confidence in how to trade through an FTA, and a lack of information or support to access the benefits of FTAs, indicating a need for further guidance.

Information Sources and Awareness: The proportions of businesses that reported high levels of knowledge on how to export (20%), where to go for information (26%) or help and support about exporting (25%) were stable in 2024. The proportion of businesses who had ever sought advice or support about exporting (43%) also remained stable. GOV.UK pages remained the main source of government support on exporting and trade, both in awareness (53%) and use (32%), though awareness and use of these pages was decreased compared with 2023 (awareness: 68%, use 45%). Most services were still not familiar to or used by the majority of businesses.

Campaign Recognition: Around 1 in 10 businesses (11%) were able to recall the DBT 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign, consistent with 2023 (13%). Just over one-quarter of businesses who were able to view the MIUK campaign ads during the interview felt they were relevant to their business (27%), an increase from 20% in 2023. The campaign was largely seen to be clear (78%) and trusted (69%) sources of information. However, agreement that the ads told businesses something new (37%) decreased since 2023 (51%). Fewer recognised the UK Export Academy campaign (4%).

1.3 Key findings by theme – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

1.3.1 General exporting behaviours

The NSRB allocates businesses into 4 separate segments as described below (see also section 3.5 for segment definitions) to reflect their exporting behaviour. The proportion of businesses falling into each of these segments has remained relatively stable across all 9 waves of the NSRB:

- just under a third (32%) of businesses had exported goods and/or services in the past 12 months and fell into the 'Sustain' segment
- additionally, 6% of businesses were either lapsed or intermittent exporters, meaning they had not exported in the last 12 months but had done so previously – these businesses made up the 'Reassure' segment
- a third segment, accounting for 17% of businesses, were those that had never exported before but believed that they could – these businesses reported having a product or service

that they self-identified as being suitable, or could be developed to be suitable, for export, and formed the 'Promote' segment

- the final segment was made up of businesses that have never exported and did not see their goods or services as being suitable for export – this group is referred to as the 'Challenge' segment and accounted for 44% of all businesses
- a remaining 1% of businesses fell outside of these segment definitions, as they were unsure of their exporting potential or history

Figure 1.1: Percentage of respondents in each exporting segment from 2015 - 2024

Segment	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sustain	33%	33%	35%	33%	34%	35%	34%	31%	32%
Reassure	8%	9%	7%	7%	6%	10%	9%	8%	6%
Promote	11%	12%	12%	13%	15%	15%	15%	18%	17%
Challenge	43%	41%	39%	38%	44%	38%	42%	42%	44%
Not specified	5%	5%	7%	8%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Total (Base)	1,160	1,139	2,535	2,448	2,557	2,485	2,405	2,181	2,182

In 2024, 38% of respondents had exported before and 61% had never exported. This represents a continued downward trend since 2021 (45% in 2021, 43% in 2022, 39% in 2023 and 38% in 2024). The overall trend arises through incremental changes across the 'Sustain' and 'Reassure' segments. However, the 2024 figure is not significantly different to levels observed between 2015 and 2020 (between 40% and 42%). The proportion of businesses in the 'Promote' segment has been trending up over the 8 waves of the NSRB though was stable in 2024, while the proportion of 'Challenge' businesses has fluctuated across years but remained stable in the past 12 months.²

Exporting behaviour in Northern Ireland (NI) remained high in comparison to the rest of the UK. However, a large proportion of NI businesses that exported did so only to the Republic of Ireland. In 2024, 29% of NI businesses reported that they had exported in the previous 12 months, but only to the Republic of Ireland. A further 21% said they exported both to the Republic of Ireland and overseas in the previous 12 months. Finally, 3% said they exported to overseas destinations only. These figures were in line with previous years.

The proportion of exporting businesses reporting either an increase or a reduction in their exports of goods and services in 2024 remained consistent with 2023. Among exporters of goods, 2 in 10 (21%) stated that their exports of goods had increased in the past 12 months. Around a third (34%) stated that they had decreased. For service exporters, the picture was slightly more favourable, with 28% stating that their exports had increased in the past year, whilst 1 in 4 (25%) stated that exports had decreased.

Just under 8 in 10 exporters (78%) said that they were 'passive' in their exporting behaviour, an increase from 71% in 2023. This means that they responded to orders from other countries but did not actively target these customers. Additionally, almost 1 in 5 exporters (19%) said they did actively target customers abroad, a decrease from 27% in 2023. One in 5 potential or lapsed exporters (21%) were planning to start or resume exporting at some point in the future. This is equivalent to 5% of the whole £500,000+ business sample.

² In 2020, the exporting segments were measured using a new set of questions in the NSRB questionnaire, which improved the allocation of respondents to segments, leaving fewer respondents unallocated. Questions have remained consistent since then. Most respondents were allocated to one of the 4 exporting segments, with a small number of unallocated businesses being those who reported being unsure of exporting behaviour, or who refused to answer questions necessary for the segmentation.

1.3.2 Barriers to exporting

Across almost all aspects of capabilities and capacity in relation to exporting that had been measured in previous years, findings were consistent with 2023. Just over 2 in 3 businesses that have products suitable for export felt they had the financial resources (71%), adequate supply chains (70%) and the capability to assess the cost of exporting (69%). Two areas of improvement were seen in staff skills (69%) and staff capacity (63%), which increased from 61% and 52%, respectively since 2023. Businesses having sufficient managerial time (61%), access to support and advisory services (60%), capability to develop an export business plan (59%), and capability to assess international competition for products or services (51%) were all unchanged since 2023. One new area of capability was introduced in 2024, the capability to research and understand FTAs (65%).

Businesses who had exported or whose products could be developed for export were asked a set of questions on barriers to exporting, last asked in 2022.³ Time and cost were seen as the greatest barriers to exporting to core markets (USA, Australia, the EU, India and the Gulf States). In relation to exporting more generally, time (39%), cost (32%) and lack of knowledge (32%) were the greatest barriers, though the proportion of reporting time and cost as a strong barrier decreased from 2022 (47% and 41% respectively).

1.3.3 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)⁴

Across all businesses with a turnover of £500,000 or more, 75% had heard of FTAs, however, less than 1 in 5 (18%) reported knowing anything about them. Among only businesses who have or could export ('Sustain', 'Reassure' and 'Promote' segments), 79% had heard of FTAs, with almost 1 in 4 (23%) knowing anything about them. Current or previous exporters ('Sustain' 27% and 'Reassure' 28%) were more likely to report knowledge of FTAs compared with non-exporters ('Promote' 15%, and 'Challenge' 11%).

Despite overall low knowledge levels, 45% of all respondents agreed that FTAs would benefit their business, which was higher among current and previous exporters (61%). However, just 1 in 4 (26%) felt that they are confident in knowing how to trade through an FTA, and fewer (17%) agreed that the government is providing information and support to help businesses access the benefits of FTAs. For most businesses, GOV.UK was seen as the primary source they would use to find information about FTAs (80%). More than half would utilise other business or professional contacts (58%), the UK government (including DBT, 58%) or trade bodies and business groups (50%), all consistent with 2023.

Over half (54%) of businesses who have ever exported reported that their goods or services were eligible for any FTA benefits, with the most commonly reported benefit being reduced customs duties (31%). Just over 2 in 5 of those aware of any benefit (43%) said they benefited always or most of the time, 33% some of the time, and 19% said they never or almost never benefit, again all consistent with 2023.

Importers were more likely to have heard of FTAs (82%) than non-importers (71%). Importers were also more likely to agree that FTAs will benefit their business (59% compared with 33% of non-importers), that they feel confident they would know how to trade through an FTA (36% compared

³ Two sets of barriers questions alternate between waves, covering internal and external barriers. wave 9 covered internal barriers, last asked in wave 7.

⁴ Free Trade Agreements set out the rules that cover trade between 2 or more countries and aim to make trading between these countries easier. This may include the removal or reduction of customs duties. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-uks-trade-agreements>

with 17% of non-importers) and that the government is providing information and support to help businesses access the benefits of FTAs (21% compared with 14% of non-importers).

1.3.4 Supply chains

In 2024, all businesses were asked about their experience of supply chains. Just over half (53%) had any experience of supply chain disruptions, a decrease from 62% in 2023. Among these, 19% were currently experiencing supply chain disruptions, down from 31% in 2023, and 34% said these had been resolved. It is important to note that the fieldwork period ended in January 2025, prior to the instigation of widespread US tariffs in spring 2025.

Among all those who had experienced supply chain disruptions in the last 3 years, the most commonly cited causes for supply chain disruptions were the EU Exit (63%), COVID-19 (63%) and general economic or inflationary pressure (50%). Those currently experiencing supply chain disruptions related to COVID-19 continued to decrease in 2024 (43%, down from 59% in 2023). Other causes of current supply chain disruptions included the cost of shipping (50%), war or conflict (46%), difficulty sourcing suitable or affordable parts (45%), and rising energy prices (44%).

1.3.5 Export knowledge and support

One fifth of businesses who do or could export felt that they had a high level of knowledge of how to export (20%), while a greater proportion felt they had low knowledge (31%), unchanged from 18% and 28% in 2023, respectively.

Just over 1 in 5 reported a low level of knowledge about where to go for information (22%) or help and support with exporting (23%), up from 14% and 15% respectively in 2023. However, the proportions reporting high levels of knowledge about where to go for information (26%) or help and support (25%) were unchanged.

The proportion of businesses that do or could export who sought advice and support remained stable at 43% in 2024, compared with 40% in 2023.

Around 7 in 10 businesses that do or could export reported being aware of at least one UK government trade support service (72%), a decline from 77% in 2023 and 78% in 2022. In line with previous years, the most common of these were GOV.UK services 'check how to export goods' (53%), though this was a decrease from 68% in 2023. There was moderate awareness of GOV.UK services 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers' at 34%.⁵

Awareness of International Trade Advisors (31%) and the Export Support Service (20%) were not significantly lower than in 2023 (34% and 23%, respectively) but continued a decline from 38% and 31% in 2022. In contrast, awareness of the UK Export Academy, while still low, increased to 11% from 8% in 2023.

Levels of usage were lower than their level of awareness, with GOV.UK services 'check how to export goods' at 32% (down from 45% in 2023), the Export Support Service at 8% and the UK Export Academy at 3% (unchanged from 10% and 2% respectively in 2023).

⁵ New item introduced in wave 9 survey

1.3.6 Expectations for growth and trade

Just under 7 in 10 (68%) businesses were aiming to grow their business, down from 73% in 2023.⁶ A further 20% were aiming for consolidation (up from 14% in 2023) and 13% felt they needed to return to profitability.

Perceptions of there being a lot of demand for UK products and services around the world increased in 2024 (62%) indicating the beginnings of a reversal following a decline over recent years. In 2023, 52% thought there was a lot of demand. For reference, this measure peaked in 2017 when 73% thought there was a lot of demand and had been declining steadily since.

However, there was little change in other attitudes towards exporting in 2024. For example, the proportion of businesses agreeing that there is a lot of opportunity for their business to grow internationally (55%) was the same as in 2023 (55%).

Businesses' views on the prospect of UK exports increasing over the next 12 months were largely unchanged in 2024, continuing a stabilisation seen in 2023. Just under 4 in 10 (38%) felt that the value of exports will stay the same in the next 12 months (37% in 2023). Around 1 in 4 (24%) felt that exports will increase, consistent with 2023 (28%) while almost the same proportion felt that exports will decrease (22%), unchanged from 21% 2023. Belief that UK export value would increase was highest in quarter 1 of fieldwork (30%) and significantly fell in quarter 3 and 4 (21%).

1.3.7 Importing

Just under half of businesses stated that they had ever imported (47%), with 2 in 5 (39%) having imported in the last 12 months, consistent with 2023. In 2024, current exporters (those in the 'Sustain' segment) were most likely to have also imported in the last 12 months, and lapsed exporters ('Reassure') were most likely to have previously imported but not in the last 12 months.

1.3.8 Advertising and campaign metrics

In 2021, high profile information and publicity around the EU Exit transition period contributed to higher awareness levels of communications activity on exporting. In 2022, awareness returned to the levels more typically seen in the years prior (28%), declining further in 2023 (24%), before stabilising in 2024 at 23%.

Government remains the main source to which businesses attribute publicity around exporting (74%). In 2024 there was no significant change in general mentions of the UK government (57% compared to 63% in 2023) or in specific mentions of the Department for Business and Trade or predecessor departments (14% in 2024, 12% in 2023).⁷ The 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' (MIUK) campaign was recognised by 11% of businesses, with fewer recognising ads for the UK Export Academy campaign (4%) or great.gov help and support pages (3%). The 2024 MIUK campaign was largely seen as clear (78%, up from 71% in 2023) and a trusted source of information (69%). Agreement that the campaign was relevant to them increased from 20% in 2023 to 27% in 2024. However, agreement that the campaign contained new information decreased

⁶ Multiple factors such as the effective base size and design weight influence 'significance', this means that the absolute size of the difference between two proportions does not alone determine whether the difference is statistically significant. For example, a difference of 5 percentage points may in one case be a significant difference, and in another case it may not. See section 3.4 for further details.

⁷ In previous waves, mentions of Department for International Trade. DBT came into existence in February 2023. In the 2024 survey, mentions of Department for International Trade (DIT) or Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) were included in the DBT attribution figure.

from 51% in 2023 to 37% in 2024, although this was higher among those who had not previously exported (44% compared with 28% of current and previous exporters). Businesses who recognised the ads were asked if they had taken any action as a result. Overall, 21% had either taken some action, planned to take action, or would consider doing so in future, unchanged from 26% in 2023.

2. Background

This chapter provides an overview of the policy background to the National Survey of Registered Businesses' exporting behaviours, attitudes and needs, as well as a summary of the aims of the survey. The full survey name has been abbreviated to 'the NSRB' throughout this report. Fieldwork for this wave (wave 9) of the NSRB took place across 2024 and early 2025.

2.1 DBT's objectives

The Department for Business and Trade is the department for economic growth. DBT supports businesses to invest, grow and export, creating jobs and opportunities across the country. The department plays a critical role in driving the government's manifesto commitments on industrial strategy, investment, small business, trade and employment rights.

The department's three objectives are outlined in its Operational Delivery Plan (ODP). This states the core outcomes of the Department for Business and Trade are to make the UK the best place in the world to do business and the best-connected global economy, whilst delivering great services to business.

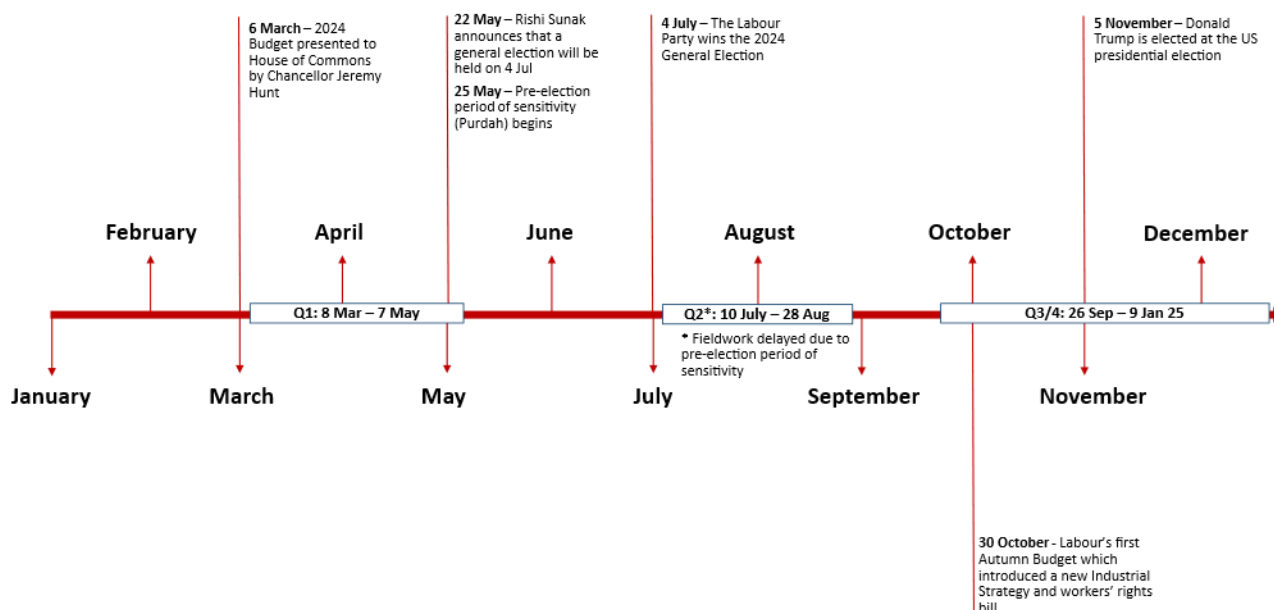
2.2 Context

2.2.1 Timeline of relevant events

This survey year (2024) was set within the context of several new and ongoing events that affected businesses both in the UK and around the world. Whilst the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic began to subside, global trade has continued to suffer from shocks including high inflation, tight financial conditions, supply chain restrictions and the continued impact of global geopolitical unrest (Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East). Global trade and business confidence has also been impacted by the US presidential election in November 2024.

Circumstances specific to the UK have also continued to have an influence on businesses, such as the UK's exit from the EU, the change in government after the 2024 general election, and the new Labour government's Autumn Budget. This government also announced policies and legislation impacting businesses, including a new industrial strategy and workers' rights.

Figure 2.1: Summary of key events potentially impacting business in 2024



2.2.2 EU Exit and future trade

The United Kingdom European Union membership referendum took place on 23 June 2016. This was an important contextual factor which was highly likely to have impacted on the data collected in waves 2 to 6 of the NSRB.

- wave 2 of the NSRB was conducted in 2016 in the run-up to the referendum, at which point businesses would have been exposed to arguments both for and against EU membership and the potential impacts on future trading arrangements
- waves 3 (2017) and 4 (2018/19) were conducted in the aftermath of the referendum result and against a background where there had been ongoing and extensive discussion of matters that would have a direct impact on exporting
- wave 5 (2020) fieldwork was conducted after the beginning of the transition period. The transition period was a time during which the UK and EU decided their future relationship post-EU withdrawal. This began on 1 January 2020 and ended on 31 December 2020, during which time the UK remained in the EU customs union and the single market. It was only towards the latter end of 2020 that clarification about the UK's future trading relationship with the EU and wider world emerged, enabling businesses to better plan their futures

EU Exit officially came into effect following the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. By the start of May 2021, the EU / UK Trade and Cooperation agreement had been ratified. Wave 6 (2021) fieldwork was conducted throughout this post-transition period. According to the ONS, the end of the EU transition period was cited as the primary reason for challenges in exporting and importing goods (compared with services). Companies reported difficulties with finding staff in the UK resulting in the need to import more services, issues with suppliers because of shortages of

materials, fuel, and drivers, and the requirement for additional paperwork and fees leading to increased costs.⁸

Throughout 2020 and the majority of 2021, DBT campaign activity was reduced to make way for a high-profile campaign about the EU Exit transition.

2.2.3 COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak in the UK began in early 2020 and rapidly grew to affect UK and international businesses to varying degrees. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the UK experienced a series of lockdowns and public health measures including social distancing, mask wearing and business or venue closure. By the start of 2022, national restrictions began to be eased, with 'Plan B' measures lifted across the UK on 27 January, and all legal restrictions around COVID-19 officially lifted in England on 24 February 2022.

In 2023, impacts of COVID-19 were less prominent, and this continued further in 2024. However, businesses were still likely to be affected in the longer term by the issues arising during the period between 2020 and 2022. As such, this will likely have continued to affect how businesses answered questions and should be considered when interpreting results across different waves of the NSRB.

2.2.4 Disruption across the world due to conflict

One of the most impactful events of 2022 that has continued into 2023 and 2024 was Russia's full-scale illegal invasion of Ukraine. In coordination with allies around the world, the UK government has implemented a suite of economic sanctions on Russia and Belarus including import tariff hikes and denying Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status with these countries. Since the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, businesses have contended with supply chain disruption and the soaring prices of energy and raw materials. The end of 2023 and through 2024 also saw conflict in the Middle East and shipping disruption in the Red Sea.

2.2.5 Economic instability and inflation

The UK economy is estimated to have grown by 1.1% overall in 2024 according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), an improvement on real GDP growth of 0.4% in 2023. Growth was significantly stronger in the first half of 2024 when quarter 1 of the fieldwork was conducted (between 8 March to 8 May 2024). Growth then flatlined over the second half of 2024 when the remaining fieldwork was conducted (Q2 between 10 July to 28 August and Q3/Q4 26 September and 9 January).

UK CPI inflation averaged 2.5% over 2024 according to the ONS, significantly down from 7.3% in 2023. Like growth, inflation also varied throughout 2024, falling consistently over the first half of the year during Q1 of field work, hitting the Bank of England (BoE) 2% target in June. It then gradually increased across the remainder of the year, reaching 3% in January 2025, when fieldwork ended. Despite the slight uptick in inflation towards the end of the year, the BoE cut interest rates twice over 2024. The Bank Rate was first reduced from 5.25% to 5.0% at the end of July, during Q2 of

⁸ See: Office for National Statistics, The impacts of EU Exit and coronavirus (COVID-19) on UK trade in services: November 2021. Released 22 November 2021 at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/theimpactsfoeuexitandcoronaviruscovid19onuktradeinservicesnovember2021>

the field work. The Bank Rate was then reduced further to 4.75% in early November, during Q3/4 of the fieldwork.

Several factors have impacted the UK economy over the wave 9 fieldwork period. This includes UK specific factors, such as the election held on 4th July 2024 (Q1 fieldwork was completed before the election but it delayed the start of Q2 fieldwork), and subsequent Autumn Budget policy announcements. In addition, external factors, including the US election in November 2024 and uncertainty about potential tariff announcements were also considerable impact factors.

3. Survey methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the survey methodology and contains information which is important for readers be aware of. Further details of the survey methodology are included in the Technical Report which is published alongside this main report.

Key points to acknowledge when reading this report are as follows:

- the NSRB was conducted using a CATI method (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing)
- interviews were undertaken with the senior manager at each participating business who was best qualified to talk about specifics of the business – this was typically the owner, proprietor, managing director or another senior decision-maker
- there are 2 separate data sets:
 - the annual findings of surveyed UK registered businesses with a turnover of £500,000+, weighted to be representative of this group
 - the annual findings of surveyed UK registered businesses weighted to be representative of the total population of UK registered businesses
- data were collected at an enterprise level (that is where respondents provide answers relating to their organisation as a whole, rather than at branch or site level)
- there are margins of error around the survey data quoted in this report and some apparent trends in charts may not be statistically significant (more details can be found in the accompanying technical report)
- written commentary focuses on findings where significance testing indicates that we can be confident the survey data show statistically significant change in relation to previous waves, i.e. unless otherwise stated, where change is discussed, these patterns are statistically significant
- the sample sizes of waves 3 to 9 are larger than those of earlier waves (and the margins of error surrounding data from these later waves are, accordingly, smaller)
- for some regional analysis, aggregated regions are occasionally used in order to explore patterns in larger administrative areas of the UK: North (covering North-West England, North-East England and Yorkshire and the Humber), Midlands (covering East Midlands and West Midlands), and South (covering South-East and South-West)
- chart footnotes below each chart provide reference to the source question number or name and question text, and the unweighted base (number of businesses who answered the question)

3.1 The objectives of the NSRB

The NSRB functions to support DBT's objectives. It is a strategic survey for the department, used by policy and strategy stakeholders across government to monitor businesses' exporting behaviours, plans, capabilities and attitudes towards exporting. It is also used as an evaluation tool for measuring the performance of DBT's communications campaigns.

Relating to the first of these aims, the NSRB is designed to:

- measure the size of the opportunity and challenge for DBT in terms of the proportion and number of companies at different stages of the exporting journey
- ascertain business attitudes to trade and exporting
- give information on barriers to exporting and how they might be addressed
- identify the level of business interest in, and engagement with, exporting support and advice
- highlight skills, resource, and knowledge gaps among businesses
- identify the barriers preventing or hindering businesses from exporting
- understand the perceived impact of Free Trade Agreements on businesses
- investigate businesses' knowledge and perceptions of Free Trade Agreements
- investigate businesses' experience of supply chain disruptions and resolution

3.2 Sample and fieldwork design

The sample for all 9 waves of the NSRB was drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The IDBR provides the main sampling frame for surveys of businesses carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other government departments. It covers approximately 2.7 million businesses in all sectors of the UK economy, other than very small businesses (those without employees and with turnover below the tax threshold) and some non-profit making organisations. The 2 main sources of input are Value Added Tax (VAT) and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) records from HMRC. Additional input comes from Companies House, Dun and Bradstreet and ONS business surveys.⁹ When drawing the sample for the NSRB, it was specified that businesses with a turnover of less than £500,000 must also be VAT registered to be included in the sample.

Businesses with £500,000+ turnover were oversampled relative to their true proportion in the underlying population, reflecting DBT's focus on High Export Potential (HEP) businesses. This allowed for more robust sub-group analysis when examining the set of businesses with £500,000+ turnover, which is the primary focus of this report. However, this sampling approach has limited the analysis of the total sample of all businesses. The weighting scheme required to compensate for the smaller proportion of lower turnover businesses results in a lower effective base size and larger margins of error around the all-business estimates.

The sample was stratified, and quotas were applied to ensure that the required number of interviews were achieved with companies of various sizes and based in different regions across the UK.

The findings from all 9 waves are included in this report. At wave 5, a new quarterly approach was introduced to the survey, which was continued for each subsequent wave. This quarterly approach allowed the questionnaire design to be more flexible to DBT's changes of priority and to political and current affairs which may have very significant impacts on businesses' exporting attitudes and behaviours. In the most recent wave for 2024 (wave 9), a minimum of 750 interviews were conducted per quarter. Wave 9 fieldwork timings were impacted by the 2024 General Election. As such, quarter 2 took place slightly later in the year compared to previous waves. In a similar approach to the previous wave, quarter 3 and quarter 4 were combined at wave 9 to take account

⁹ Information about the IDBR is available online from the ONS
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/paidservices/interdepartmentalbusinessregisteridbr>

of the slightly later fieldwork start time in 2024. The timing of fieldwork for each wave was as follows:

- wave 1: 20 October to 6 November 2015
- wave 2: 1 April to 4 May 2016
- wave 3: 26 July to 7 September 2017
- wave 4: 23 October 2018 to 4 January 2019
- wave 5 quarter 1: 3 February to 20 March 2020
- wave 5 quarter 2: 5 June to 10 July 2020
- wave 5 quarter 3/ quarter 4: 5 November to 14 December 2020
- wave 6 quarter 1: 1 February to 11 March 2021
- wave 6 quarter 2: 10 May to 14 June 2021
- wave 6 quarter 3: 9 August to 17 September 2021
- wave 6 quarter 4: 1 November to 15 December 2021
- wave 7 quarter 1: 21 February to 7 April 2022
- wave 7 quarter 2: 2 May to 16 June 2022
- wave 7 quarter 3/ quarter 4: 20 September to 13 December 2022
- wave 8 quarter 1: 27 February to 31 March 2023
- wave 8 quarter 2: 19 April to 30 May 2023
- wave 8 quarter 3/ quarter 4: 23 August to 23 November 2023
- wave 9 quarter 1: 8 March to 7 May 2024
- wave 9 quarter 2: 10 July to 28 August 2024
- wave 9 quarter 3/ quarter 4: 26 September 2024 to 9 January 2025

The survey data are not longitudinal – a separate sample of businesses was interviewed at each wave.

The NSRB collects enterprise level data whereby respondents give answers in relation to their organisation as a whole rather than focusing on smaller reporting units within the organisation. This means that the NSRB reports a higher incidence of exporters than is found in surveys which publish data based on reporting units (given that many businesses will comprise some reporting units which export and some reporting units which do not). The Annual Business Survey is the UK's main structural business survey which provides reporting-unit level data.¹⁰

3.3 Sample size and effective base sizes

The unweighted sample sizes achieved in each wave are shown in Figure 3.1 and the quarterly breakdown for wave 9 in Figure 3.2.

All waves of the survey were weighted to ensure that they matched the profile of businesses on the IDBR at the time the sample was drawn in terms of:

¹⁰ See:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/annualbusinesssurvey>

- business turnover interlocked with number of employees
- region
- broad sector

Both sets of data that have been produced are weighted on the above factors. The first data set is based only on £500,000+ turnover businesses (the focus of Chapters 4-11). The second is based on the total population of registered businesses (the focus of Chapter 12).

The effective base sizes for each of these data sets are also shown in Figure 3.1¹¹. The effective base size takes account of the reduction in statistical reliability associated with weighting data and is the value which is used in any significance testing conducted throughout this report. Chart footnotes report unweighted bases throughout, reflecting the raw number of businesses who answered each question underlying the weighted proportions reported. Where base sizes are low and as such findings should be treated with caution, this is noted in the chart notes. See the accompanying technical report for further details of the weighting schemes.

Figure 3.1: Unweighted and effective base sizes by data set

Sample	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9
£500,000+ businesses – unweighted base	1,160	1,139	2,535	2,448	2,557	2,485	2,405	2,181	2,182
£500,000+ businesses – effective base	922	909	1,617	1,319	1,457	1,080	1,422	1,471	1,487
All businesses – unweighted base	1,405	1,418	2,991	3,000	3,001	3,002	3,001	3,004	2,969
All businesses – effective base	347	405	550	635	529	674	855	1,199	1,241

¹¹ The effective base size is calculated as:
(sum of the weight factors applied to each record) squared / the sum of the squared weight factors

Figure 3.2: Unweighted and effective base sizes by quarter, wave 9

Sample	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3/ Quarter 4
£500,000+ businesses – unweighted base	533	555	1,094
£500,000+ businesses – effective base	346	334	819
All businesses – unweighted base	737	765	1,467
All businesses – effective base	303	330	609

3.4 Statistical significance

Survey data is subject to error. In most cases, the responses obtained from a survey sample will not perfectly reflect the wider population that the sample represents. For example, bias may be introduced depending on the unwillingness of certain respondents to participate in the survey.

The contact sample for this survey is originally drawn using a stratified sampling approach, then quotas are set for interviewers to fill to ensure that some sub-groups of the population are over-sampled, with the intention that base sizes for these subgroups can be sufficiently large to provide robust results. For example, businesses with a turnover of more than £500,000 are over-sampled.

Confidence Intervals are used to provide a range (based on the sample) within which the true value (in the whole study population) is expected to lie, a certain percentage of the time. For the NSRB we use a 95% confidence interval, meaning that we accept that 5% of the time the true value will fall outside of the confidence limit. However, as confidence intervals rely on a known probability of selection, with a quota sample - like this in this study - the probabilities of selection are not equal or known and so confidence intervals do not apply in the traditional sense. Similarly, formal significance tests cannot be used with quota sampling for similar reasons.

Despite this, we have still turned to confidence intervals to give an idea of the uncertainty around the results and significance testing has been used throughout this report to guide our commentary.¹² Charts also highlight where differences across waves or between sub-groups are sufficiently large to note.

Confidence intervals and significance testing has been applied in the way that it would for data generated from a random probability sample. The effective base, which considers the reduction in statistical reliability associated with weighting the data, is used in the significance testing as opposed to the unweighted or weighted base. Significance tests considered in this report are two-tailed, that is, they test for a difference between two results at the 95% confidence level, rather than for an increase or a decrease. It must be made clear that since the data has been generated from a quota sample, none of the findings in this report are statistically significant in the conventional sense; that is, being able to assume to within a stated degree of probability that they also apply to the wider population. Where 'significance' is referenced, this is only intended as a guide as to which findings are notably different. Given the multiple factors such as the effective

¹² Commentary throughout the report focuses on data that, in an equivalent random probability sample, would be statistically significant at a 95 per cent confidence level. This means that if the survey were to be conducted 100 times, a finding of the same nature (for example sub-group A is more likely to respond in a certain way than sub-group B) would be found on at least 95 occasions.

base and design weight that influence ‘significance’, this also means that the absolute size of the difference between two proportions does not alone determine whether the difference is statistically significant. For example, a 5% difference between two proportions may in one case be a significant difference, and in another case it may not.

3.5 Segment definitions

DBT groups all UK businesses into 4 segments that reflect businesses’ views on their potential to export. At wave 5, some amendments were made to questions used to define the segments. These changes have enabled DBT to group businesses by segment more accurately and have substantially reduced the numbers of businesses unallocated to a segment whilst keeping proportions in each segment consistent. For more on this, please see the wave 5 technical report.¹³

The 4 segments are outlined in Figure 3.3 below:

Figure 3.3: Exporting segments

Sustain (current exporters): businesses that have exported goods or services in the past 12 months
Reassure (lapsed exporters): businesses that have not exported in the past 12 months, but had exported previously
Promote (potential exporters): businesses that have never exported but self-identify as having goods or services that could potentially be exported or developed for export
Challenge (non-exporters): businesses that have never exported and do not currently see their goods or services as suitable for export

¹³ See: Department for International Trade, DIT National Survey of Registered Businesses Technical Report – wave 5, 16 June 2021:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994096/dit-national-survey-of-registered-businesses-exporting-behaviours-attitudes-and-needs-2020-technical-report-wave-5.pdf

4. Current and future exporting behaviours – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

This chapter examines whether UK businesses are currently exporting and, if not, whether they potentially could. It also investigates how this has changed over time, and whether businesses are planning to start exporting.

Overall, findings are broadly consistent with previous years, although there is a continuing decline in the proportion of businesses which have exported before. Among businesses which have exported before there has been an improvement in the balance between businesses reporting a decline and those reporting an increase in their exports, but also an increased passivity towards exporting.

Key findings

- just over 3 in 10 (32%) businesses reported exporting¹⁴ in the last 12 months, while a further 6% reported exporting more than 12 months ago but not in the last 12 months. As such, a total of 38% of businesses had direct experience of exporting (whether current or past). There has been a steady downward trend in the proportion of businesses which have exported before (from 45% in 2021 to 38% in 2024), largely driven by a decline in the proportion of those which had exported more than 12 months ago but not in the last 12 months
- in line with previous years, businesses in Northern Ireland were more likely to be current exporters (52%) than those in the rest of the UK, although this is driven by exports to the Republic of Ireland, with very few Northern Irish businesses exporting solely to overseas destinations
- the sectors containing the largest proportion of current exporters were information and communication and manufacturing, raw materials and energy (both 54%), followed by professional and services (40%) and wholesale and retail (38%)
- Almost 1 in 4 (23%) businesses had exported goods and 14% had exported services in the past 12 months. Both of these are stable over recent years
- as in 2023, those who had exported goods in the previous 12 months were more likely to report a reduction (34%) than an increase in these exports (21%). However, the gap between the proportion of businesses reporting a reduction and those reporting an increase in exports has been steadily reducing over the past 2 years. Among those who had exported services in the previous 12 months, a similar number reported a reduction (25%) as reported an increase (28%) in these exports. This is in line with the past 2 years
- levels of passivity towards exporting are now at the highest they have been over recent years. Around 8 in 10 businesses (78%) who had exported before reported that they

¹⁴ This was self-reported by respondents, who stated that they had exported either goods or services outside of the UK. Goods are defined as physical, consumable items that are exchanged/transferred between a buyer and a seller. Services are defined as transactions in which knowledge, actions or skills are provided by the seller to the buyer, and no physical goods are transferred. Services include intangible goods, such as digital goods, where the consumer does not own the intellectual property but is instead accessing it via a digital platform (such as music streaming).

respond to orders from abroad, but do not specifically target customers in other countries, while 2 in 10 (19%) took a more active approach, intentionally targeting customers in specific countries

- in 2024, 9 in 10 (90%) current and lapsed exporters had exported to at least one of the core markets in the past 5 years, down from 94% in 2023. These 'core markets' were defined in both 2023 and 2024 as the EU, the USA, the Gulf States, Australia and India. Almost all current and lapsed exporters (85%) had exported to the EU in the past 5 years and half (50%) had exported to the USA. Despite overall levels of exports to any core market being down in 2024, there were no significant changes in exports to any individual core market
- there continued to be a substantial pool of businesses with self-reported potential for exporting, but who were not currently doing so (those businesses in the 'Promote' and 'Reassure'¹⁵ segments). The majority of these, however, did not have plans to start exporting (78% and 74% respectively)

4.1 Current exporting behaviours

This section focuses on the exporting segments outlined in Figure 3.3. These segments provide a summary of where businesses are positioned on their exporting journey. In 2020, the exporting segments were measured using a new set of questions in the NSRB questionnaire, which improved the allocation of respondents to segments, leaving fewer respondents unallocated. Questions have remained consistent since then. Most respondents were allocated to one of the 4 exporting segments outlined in Figure 3.3, with a small number of unallocated businesses being those who reported being unsure of exporting behaviour, or who refused to answer questions necessary for the segmentation.

As shown in Figure 4.1, 1 in 3 (32%) businesses had exported either goods or services in the past 12 months and fell into the 'Sustain' segment. A further 6% were lapsed exporters, who had exported before but not in the past 12 months, known as the 'Reassure' segment. As such, a total of 38% of businesses had direct experience of exporting (whether current or past).

Around 1 in 6 (17%) businesses had never exported but self-identified as having goods or services that were suitable, or which could be developed, for export – constituting the 'Promote' segment. This is the group from which brand new exporters are most likely to come. Given that the population of registered businesses with a turnover of at least £500,000 is 508,000,¹⁶ the number of businesses in the 'Promote' segment is estimated to be between 76,000 and 95,000 in 2024.¹⁷ This is very similar to 2023, when there were between 77,000 and 96,000 businesses in the segment.

Combining the number of potential brand new exporters in the 'Promote' segment with lapsed exporters in the 'Reassure' segment, who could restart their exporting journey, there are potentially

¹⁵ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

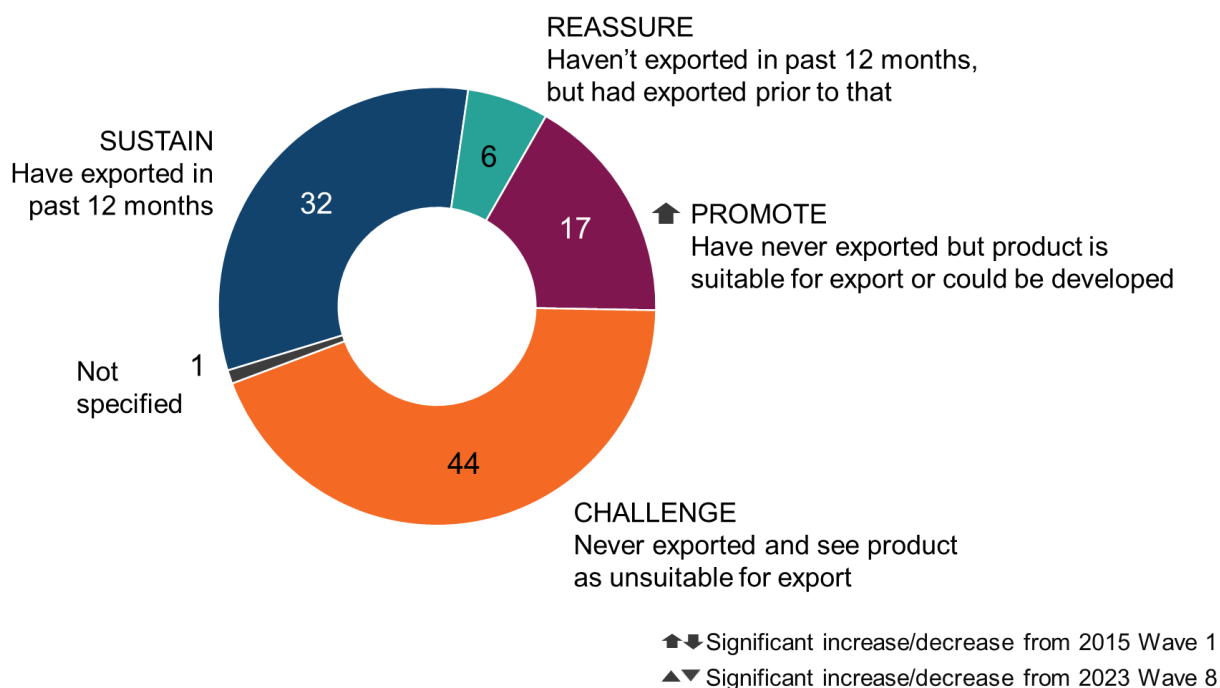
¹⁶ Population count taken from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) which was drawn by DBT and provided to Verian on 12 February 2024.

¹⁷ The unrounded proportion of businesses in the 'Promote' segment was 16.85%. There is a margin of error of $\pm 1.904\%$ associated with the survey estimate at a 95% confidence level and so the proportion of businesses in this segment is estimated to lie between 14.94% and 18.75%. The lower estimate is therefore 14.94% of 508,000 and the upper estimate is 18.75% of 508,000, which give rounded values of 76,000 and 95,000 respectively. The provisos for the calculation of confidence intervals on quota samples outlined in chapter 3 also apply here.

23% of UK businesses with turnover of at least £500,000 who could start or resume exporting in the future. This equates to between 107,000 and 129,000 businesses.¹⁸

The 'Challenge' segment, comprising businesses that have never exported and who view their product or service as unsuitable for export, accounted for just over 4 in 10 (44%) of all businesses. The remaining 1% of businesses fell outside the segment definitions and were typically uncertain of their exporting potential or history.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of businesses in each exporting segment (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables.

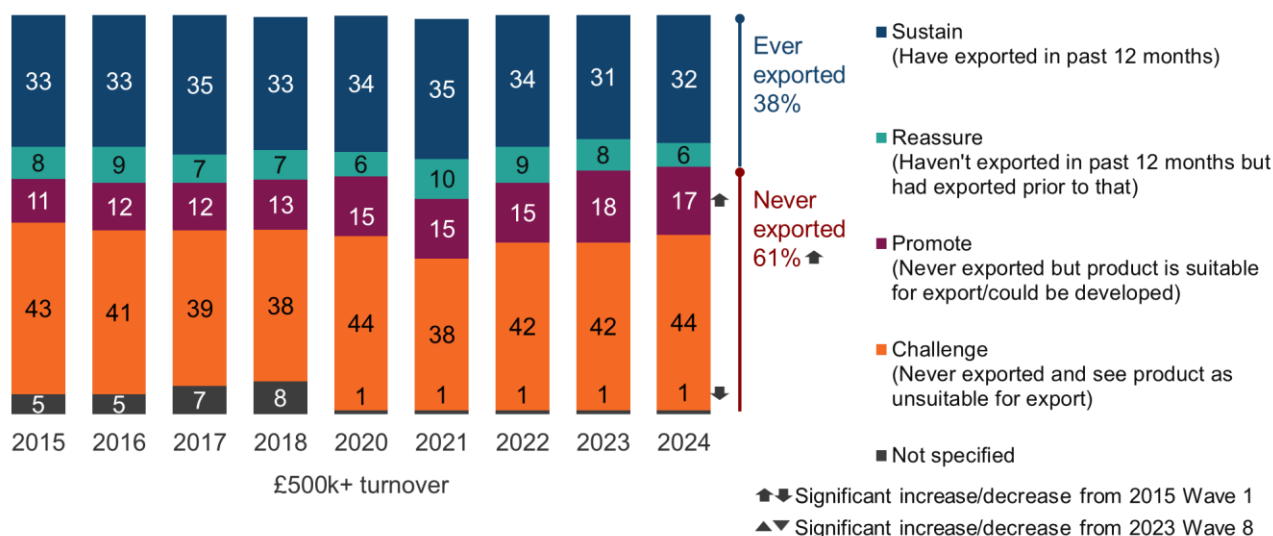
Base: All respondents: £500,000+ turnover 2024 wave 9 (2,182)

Since 2021, there has been a steady downward trend in the proportion of businesses who have exported before (from 45% in 2021 to 38% in 2024). This trend over recent years has largely been driven by a decline in the proportion of business in the 'Reassure' segment (from 10% in 2021 to 6% in 2024). Declines in the proportion of business in the 'Sustain' segment over the same period are not significant (35% in 2021, 32% in 2024) but have still contributed to the overall downward trend in businesses with exporting experience.

The proportion of businesses in the 'Promote' segment has been trending upwards over the 9 waves of the NSRB (from 11% in 2015 to 17% in 2024), although this has levelled off since 2023 when the proportion of 'Promote' businesses peaked at 18%. The proportion of 'Challenge' businesses has increased since 2021 (from 38% in 2021 to 44% in 2024) (Figure 4.2).

¹⁸ The unrounded proportion of businesses in the 'Promote' and 'Reassure' segments combined was 23.31%. There is a margin of error of $\pm 2.151\%$ associated with the survey estimate at a 95% confidence level and so the proportion of businesses in this segment is estimated to lie between 21.16% and 25.46%. The lower estimate is therefore 21.16% of 508,000 and the upper estimate is 25.46% of 508,000, which give rounded values of 107,000 and 129,000 respectively. The provisos for the calculation of confidence intervals on quota samples outlined in chapter 3 also apply here.

Figure 4.2: Proportion of businesses in each exporting segment over time (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables.

Base: All respondents: 2015 wave 1 / 2016 wave 2 / 2017 wave 3 / 2018 wave 4 / 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: All £500,000+ turnover (1,160 / 1,139 / 2,535 / 2,448 / 2,557 / 2,485 / 2,405 / 2,181 / 2,182)

In 2024, micro businesses (with 0 to 9 employees) were the most likely to have had exporting experience (41%), although the downward trend in exporting since 2021 was apparent across all business sizes. In previous years it has more typically been large businesses (with 250+ employees) which have been most likely to have had exporting experience.

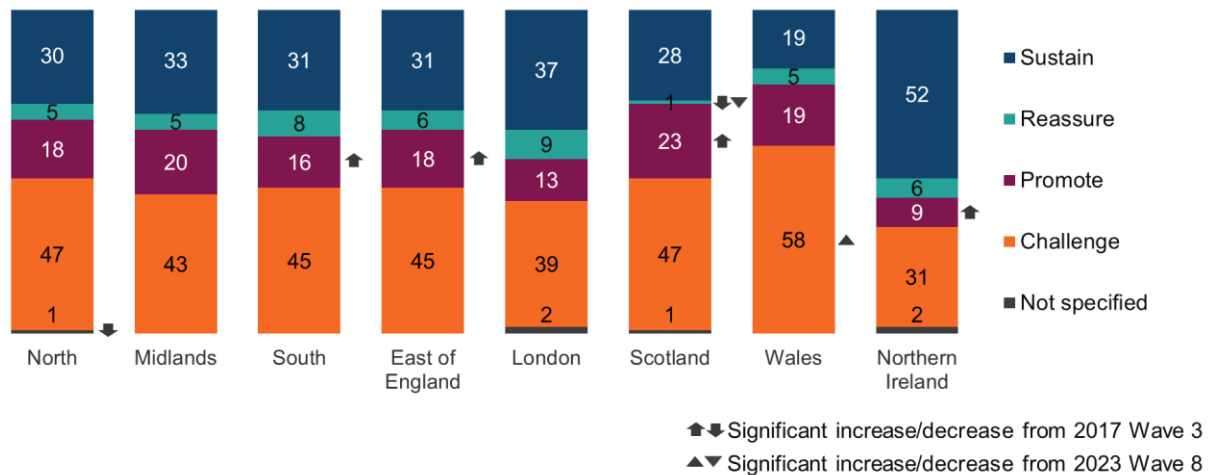
When looking at the results at the national and regional levels, some care is required when interpreting the results given smaller sample bases. What is evident is that, as in previous years, businesses in Northern Ireland (52%) were more likely to be current exporters (in the 'Sustain' segment) than those in other regions, which, apart from London with 37% current exporters, all had around 1 in 4 to 1 in 3 businesses in the 'Sustain' segment (Figure 4.3). Correspondingly, Northern Ireland also had the smallest proportion of 'Challenge' businesses (31%), compared with around 4 in 10 in most other regions, but rising to 58% in Wales.

It is worth noting that although exporting behaviour in Northern Ireland appears to be high in comparison with the rest of the UK, a sizeable proportion only export to the Republic of Ireland. In 2024, 3 in 10 (29%) Northern Irish businesses reported that they had exported in the past 12 months but only to the Republic of Ireland, 2 in 10 (21%) said they exported both to the Republic of Ireland and overseas, and 3% exported to overseas destinations only. This is in line with previous years.

Across the majority of regions, the year-on-year picture was broadly stable. However, there was a decrease in the proportion of lapsed current exporters (in the 'Reassure' segment) in Scotland, from 8% in 2023 to just 1% in 2024. Due to relatively small sample sizes in Scotland, it may be that the 2024 figure is an anomaly as in all previous years the proportion of lapsed exporters has fluctuated slightly but has ranged from 6% to 11%. There was no significant difference year on year in Scotland in the proportion of current exporters or in the number of businesses which had ever exported. In Wales, the proportion of businesses in the 'Challenge' segment increased to 58% (from 43% in 2023). However, this is a return to levels seen in Wales in 2022 (55%), and over the

years there has typically been some fluctuation in the proportion of ‘Challenge’ businesses in Wales.

Figure 4.3: Proportion of businesses in each exporting segment by super-region¹⁹ and region (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables.

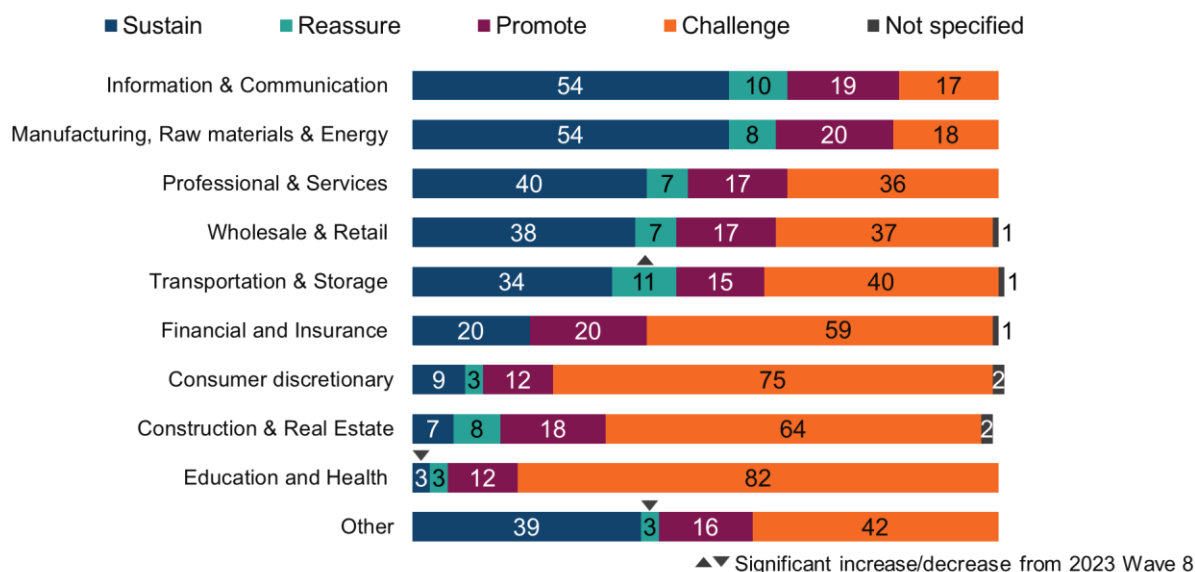
Base: All respondents: 2024 wave 9: All £500k+ turnover (2182); North (359); Midlands (286); South (544); East of England (259); London (289); Scotland (151); Wales (158); Northern Ireland (136)

As shown in Figure 4.4, businesses in the information and communication and the manufacturing, raw materials and energy sectors were particularly likely to have exported in the last 12 months (both 54%). For both these sectors, this was consistent with previous years. Around 4 in 10 businesses in professional and services (40%) and wholesale and retail (38%) sectors also fell into the ‘Sustain’ segment, which was again consistent with previous years. As in previous years, there was low prevalence of current exporters in the education and health (3%), construction and real estate (7%) and consumer discretionary (9%) sectors, with these businesses more likely to be in the ‘Challenge’ segment (84%, 64% and 75% respectively).

Although education and health businesses have consistently included among the lowest proportions of current exporters, the 3% recorded in 2024 was the lowest to date and represents a significant decline from 2023 (12%). In the consumer discretionary sector, although there was no significant change in the proportion of current exporters, the proportion of those who had ever exported fell from 25% in 2023 to 12% in 2024. In the transportation and storage sector, there was an increase in the proportion of businesses which either currently or had previously exported (45%, compared with 26% in 2023), returning to levels seen more consistently in previous years.

¹⁹ The super-regions are the North (comprising the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber), Midlands (comprising East Midlands and West Midlands) and South (comprising the South East and South West)

Figure 4.4: Proportion of businesses in each exporting segment by sector (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables (Q15A, Q15Ai, Q15B, Q15Bi, Q17A, Q17Ai, Q17B, Q17Bi, Q19A)

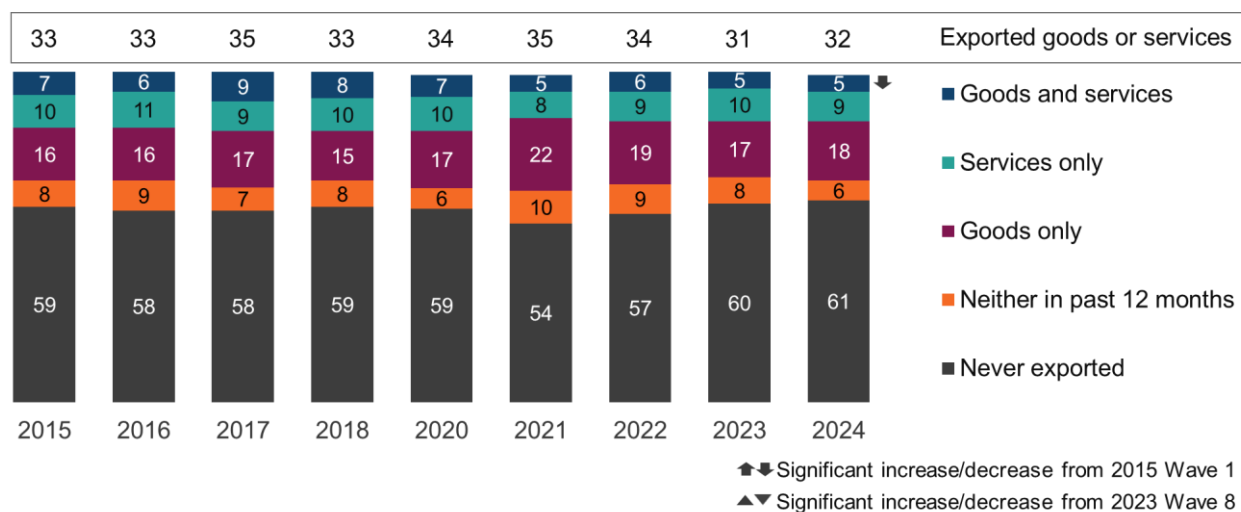
Base: All £500,000+ turnover respondents: 2024 wave 9: Construction & Real Estate (226); Consumer discretionary (118); Financial and Insurance (52); Education and Health (160); Manufacturing, Raw Materials & Energy (438); Information & Communication (68); Other (176); Wholesale & Retail (478); Professional & Services (311); Transportation & Storage (115)

4.2 Exporting goods and services

In 2024, almost 3 in 10 businesses (27%) stated that they previously exported goods outside of the UK and 2 in 10 (19%) stated that they had previously exported services. Almost in 4 businesses (23%) had exported goods in the past 12 months and 14% had exported services in the past 12 months. The proportion of businesses which had ever exported goods has been trending downwards since 2021 (34%), but otherwise these figures have remained stable over the past few years.

In 2024, 1 in 6 businesses (18%) reported exporting only goods in the past 12 months, while 1 in 10 (9%) had exported only services in the past 12 months. One in twenty businesses (5%) reported that they had exported both goods and services in the past 12 months. This represents a picture of stability over recent years (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Whether exported goods and/or services in past 12 months (% all respondents)



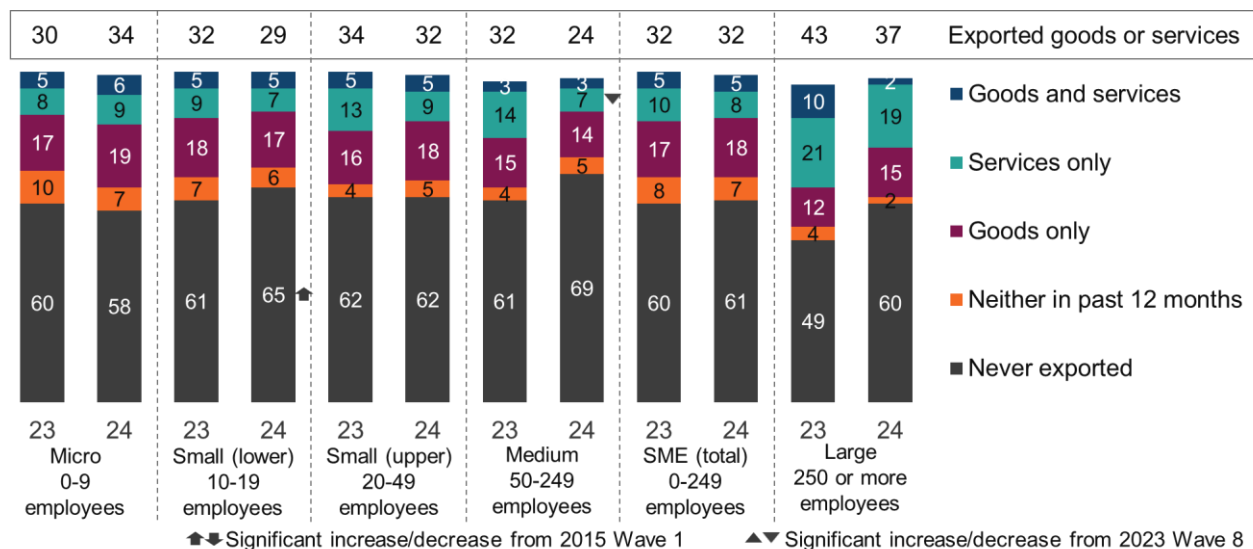
Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables (Q15A, Q15Ai, Q15B, Q15Bi, Q17A, Q17Ai, Q17B, Q17Bi).

Base: All respondents: 2015 wave 1 / 2016 wave 2 / 2017 wave 3 / 2018 wave 4 / 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: All £500,000+ turnover (1,160 / 1,139 / 2,535 / 2,448 / 2,557 / 2,485 / 2,405 / 2,181 / 2,182) NB: 'Don't know' is not shown so values may not add to 100%.

As in previous years, large businesses (with 250+ employees) were the most likely to have exported services (21%) in the past 12 months (Figure 4.6). This appears to be a sizeable decline from 2023 (31%) but given the small number of large businesses in the sample, this change is not significant. There were no significant differences by business size in the likelihood to have exported goods in the past 12 months.

Across the spectrum of business sizes, there were no other notable changes by business size in the export of either goods or services in the past 12 months, aside from for medium businesses (50-249 employees), where the proportion exporting only services fell from 14% in 2023 to 7% in 2024. The longer-term picture for medium businesses shows a trend of a decline in exports within the last 12 months for both services overall (10% in 2024, down from a peak of 22% in 2017) and for goods (17% in 2024, down from a peak of 34% in 2020).

Figure 4.6: Whether exported goods and/or services in past 12 months - by business size (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables (Q15A, Q15Ai, Q15B, Q15Bi, Q17A, Q17Ai, Q17B, Q17Bi).

Base: All £500,000+ turnover respondents: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: Micro (971 / 911); Small (lower band) (407 / 461); Small (upper band) (345 / 413); Medium (341 / 302); SME (2,064 / 2,087); Large (117 / 95) NB: 'Don't know' is not shown so values may not add to 100%.

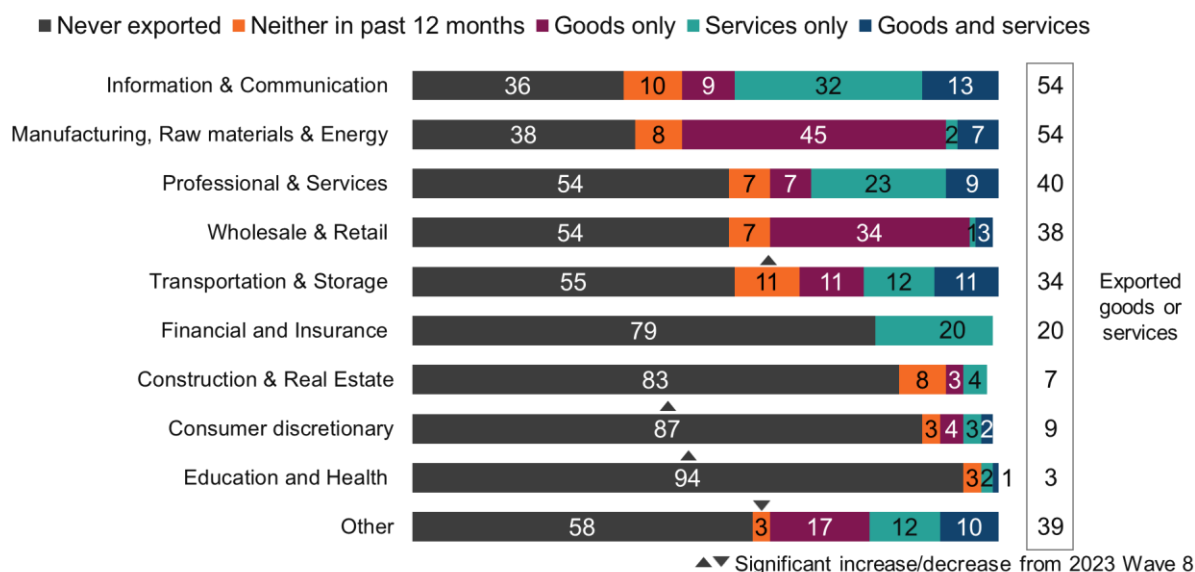
In 2024, businesses in Northern Ireland were most likely to have exported goods in the past 12 months (41%), compared with typically around 20% to 30% in all other regions, although lower in London (16%) and Wales (15%). However, this includes goods exports to the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland goods exports to countries excluding the ROI in the past 12 months was in line with other regions (19%).

Businesses in London were most likely to have exported services in the past 12 months (25%), followed by those in Northern Ireland (18%). In comparison, only 7% of businesses in Wales had exported services in the past 12 months.

Figure 4.7 shows differences in exports by sector. Over half of businesses in the information and communication and manufacturing, raw materials and energy sectors had exported in the past 12 months (both 54%). For information and communication businesses this was driven by exports of services (45% overall, and 32% had only exported services), whereas for manufacturing, raw materials and energy businesses this was driven by exports of goods (52% overall and 45% had only exported goods). Levels of last 12 months exports of goods were also relatively high among businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (37%), while professional and services businesses had relatively high levels of exports of services in the last 12 months (32%).

Around 9 in 10 businesses in consumer discretionary (87%) and education and health (94%) sectors stated that they had never exported. Both of these were higher than reported in 2023 (74% and 86% respectively).

Figure 4.7: Whether exported goods and/or services in past 12 months - by sector (% all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables (Q15A, Q15Ai, Q15B, Q15Bi, Q17A, Q17Ai, Q17B, Q17Bi).

Base: All £500,000+ turnover respondents: 2024 wave 9: Construction & Real Estate (226); Consumer discretionary (118); Financial and Insurance (52); Education and Health (160); Manufacturing, Raw Materials & Energy (438); Information & Communication (68); Other (176); Wholesale & Retail (478); Professional & Services (311); Transportation & Storage (115) NB: 'Don't know' is not shown so this does not always add to 100%

4.3 Export change in the last 12 months

Figure 4.8 shows the proportion of exporting businesses reporting growth, stability or contraction in their exports of goods and services over the past year. These figures have some caveats attached. Businesses in Northern Ireland were asked separate questions about their change in exports to each of the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. The figures we use here, which report on the data at an 'overall' level, exclude responses from Northern Irish businesses who exported only to the Republic of Ireland. This is to avoid double-counting of businesses who exported both to the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere (and were therefore asked both questions in the survey). We do not separately report on Northern Irish businesses which export to the Republic of Ireland due to the small sample size of this group.

Among current exporters of goods (those who said they had exported in the past 12 months), 2 in 10 (21%) stated that their exports of goods had increased in the past 12 months, while 1 in 3 (34%) stated that they had decreased. This equates to a net balance score²⁰ of -13%, which is a directional improvement from 2023 (-18%). This was due to fewer businesses reporting a decrease in their exports (39% in 2023), and although this change was not significant it was a further positive movement from a high of 43% reporting a decrease in their exports in 2022.

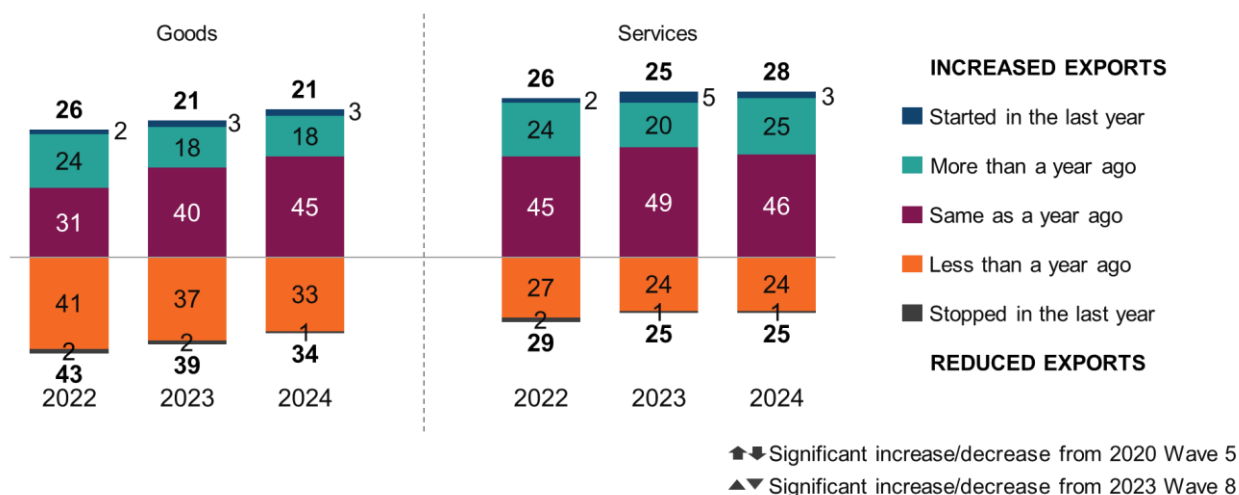
Among current exporters of services, 3 in 10 (28%) stated that their exports of services had increased in the past 12 months, with a further 1 in 4 (25%) stating that they had decreased. This

²⁰ The net balance score is calculated as the percentage of businesses that have increased their exports minus the percentage of businesses that have decreased their exports.

equates to a net balance score of +3%, which is in line with recent years (zero in 2023 and -3% in 2022).

For both goods and services, there were no significant changes from 2023, or from when the questions were first asked in 2020, and there remains a sizeable gap between the number of exporters of goods reporting a reduction and those reporting an increase in their exporting activity, which does not exist for exporters of services.

Figure 4.8: Changes in exports over past year (% of exporters of goods/services in past 12 months)



Source: Q16A/C/Q18A/C. Thinking about the last 12 months or so, which of the following best describes your export of [goods/services]?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses who have exported goods/services in past 12 months, excluding exports from NI to the ROI: 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: Goods (720 / 570 / 554) Services (334 / 303 / 274) NB: 'Don't know' is not shown so values may not add to 100%.

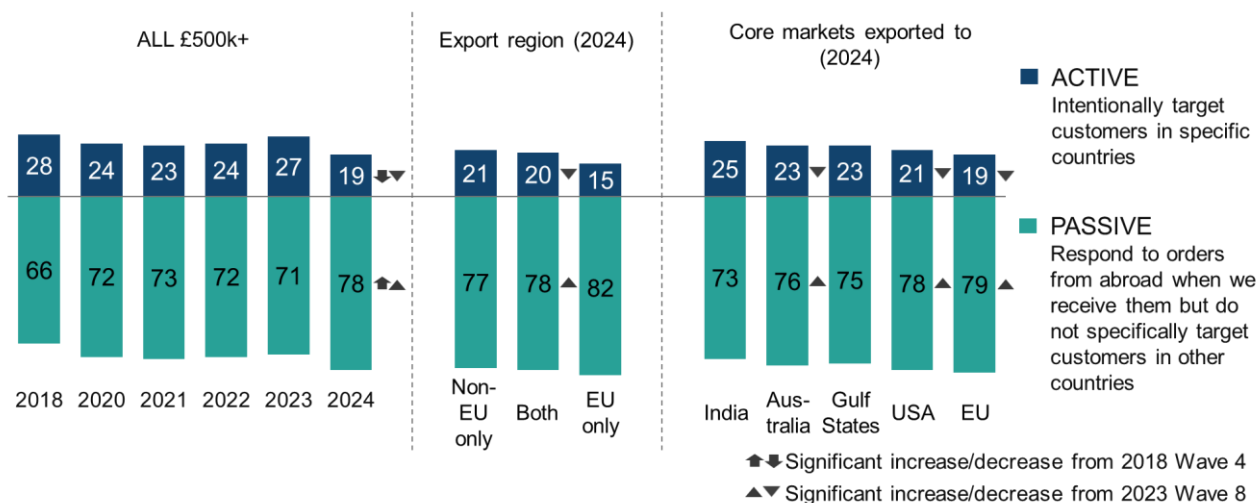
4.4 Active and passive exporting

In 2024, 8 in 10 exporters (78%) said that they were essentially 'passive' in their exporting behaviours. Passive was defined as businesses who stated that they respond to orders from abroad when received, but do not specifically target customers in other countries. Around 2 in 10 exporters (19%) reported that they intentionally targeted customers in specific countries and would therefore be classified as 'active' exporters. As shown in Figure 4.9, in 2024 there was a higher proportion of passive exporters and a lower proportion of active exporters than at any other point this question has been asked (since 2018).

There were no differences in taking an 'active' vs. taking a 'passive' approach in 2024 between businesses which had exported to only EU, only non-EU or both types of market, or between exporters to different core markets²¹, which in 2024 (as in 2023) were defined as India, Australia, the Gulf States, the USA and the EU. However, the proportion of businesses taking a passive approach increased for those exporting to both EU and non-EU markets and for those exporting to Australia, the USA and the EU.

²¹ Core export markets are described further in Section 4.5.

Figure 4.9: Passive or active approach to exporting (% of all who have ever exported)



Source: Q24A1. Thinking about countries that you have exported to, which of the following statements best describes the typical approach of your business to exporting?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses who have exported: 2018 wave 4 / 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,226 / 1,173 / 1,269 / 1,170 / 957 / 887); Export region 2024 wave 9: Non-EU only / Both / EU only (66* / 565 / 192), Export market 2024 wave 9: India / Australia / Gulf States / USA / EU (156 / 272 / 302 / 430 / 757) * Base size is below 100; treat with caution

4.5 Export markets

In 2023 DBT identified the EU, USA, Gulf States,²² Australia and India as priorities for inclusion in the NSRB, based on their strategic significance to UK trade and relevance to DBT policies.²³ These core markets remained the same for 2024, although have previously typically changed each year. In 2024, 9 in 10 (90%) of those who had exported before had exported to one of these markets in the past 5 years, down from 94% in 2023 (Figure 4.10).²⁴ This was largely made up of those who had exported to the EU (85%), consistent with previous years.²⁵

Half (50%) of those who had ever exported reported exporting to the USA in the past 5 years, in line with previous years, and 3 in 10 reported exporting to the Gulf States (35%) and Australia (31%). This was an increase for the Gulf States from when they were first included in 2022 (22%), however this may be due to a slight change in definition from 2022, when UAE was considered separately (30% exported to the UAE and 22% to the Gulf States in 2022). The proportion of current and lapsed exporters who stated that they had exported to India in the past 5 years remained stable at 17%.

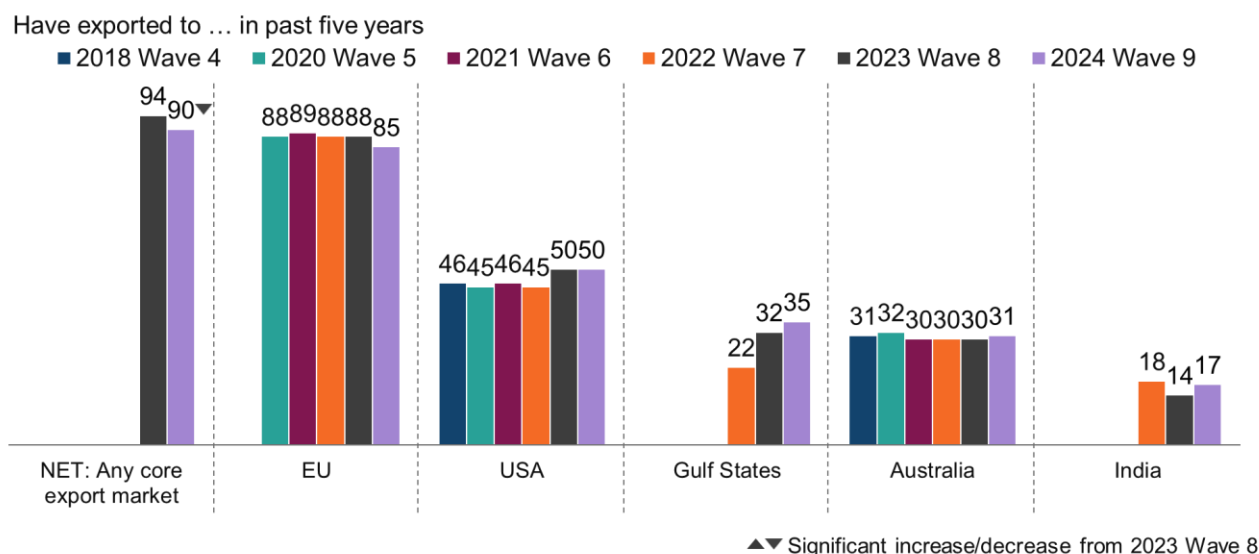
²² In 2023 Gulf States included United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In 2022 UAE was not included in the definition and was asked about separately.

²³ The core market set also has an impact on the way respondents are routed through the questionnaire, and therefore also on the data available for analysis.

²⁴ Exports to any core market are not shown for years prior to 2023 due to the change in which markets were included.

²⁵ The EU has been included in the survey since 2020 but has only been defined as a core market since 2023.

Figure 4.10: Involvement in exporting to core markets (% of all who have ever exported)



Source: Q25A. Which, if any, of the following countries have you exported to over the past five years?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have exported: 2018 wave 4 / 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1126 / 1173 / 1269 / 1170 / 957 / 887)

Current and lapsed exporters in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in other parts of the UK to have exported to any core market (61%, down from 82% in 2023), and to each of the core markets individually (EU: 58%, USA: 21%, Gulf States: 12%, Australia: 12%, India: 0%), in the past 5 years. Businesses in the East of England which had exported before were more likely than those in other regions to have exported to Australia (45%) in the past 5 years.

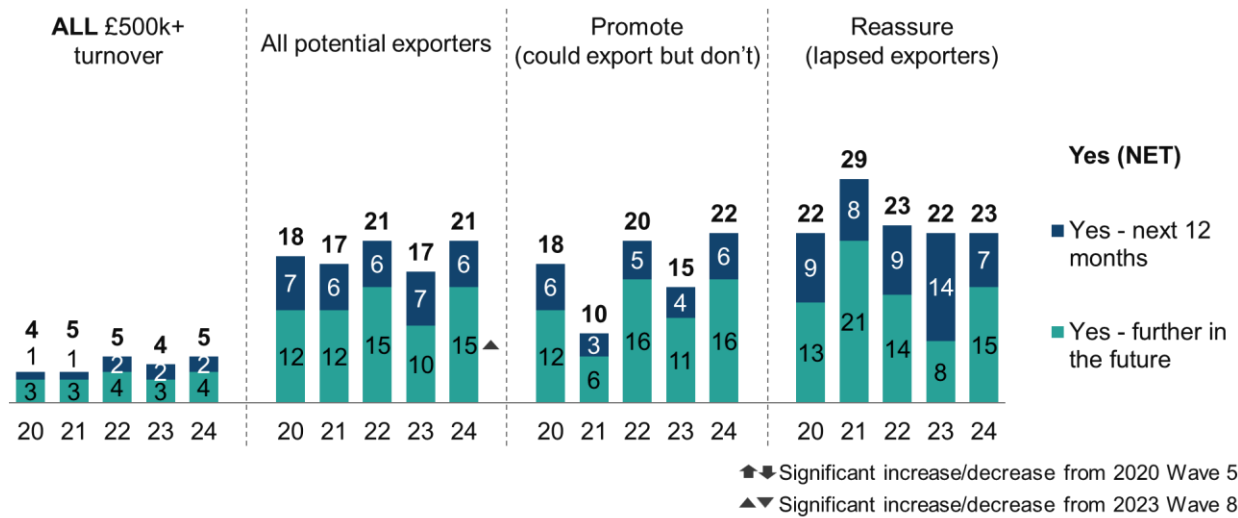
4.6 Future plans for exporting

As shown in Figure 4.11, 21% of those who hadn't exported in the previous 12 months but had a suitable product or service were planning to start exporting at some point in the future. This was in line with previous years, and as in previous years, more businesses were planning to start exporting further than 12 months into the future (15%) than in the next 12 months (6%). This suggests that those looking to start or get back into exporting need a longer period of planning before they begin to export.

As in previous years, there remains a substantial pool of businesses with self-reported potential for exporting, but who are not currently doing so (those businesses in the 'Promote' and 'Reassure' segments). The majority of these did not have plans to start exporting (78% and 74% respectively, in line with previous years).

The proportion of businesses planning to begin or recommence exporting at some point in the future (be it in the next 12 months or longer) is equivalent to 5% of the whole £500,000+ business sample.

Figure 4.11: Whether plan to start exporting (% all respondents)



Source: Q27. Do you have plans to start exporting or licensing your goods or services outside the UK? If yes: do you think this will be in the next 12 months or further in the future?

Base: All respondents 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: £500k+ turnover (2,557 / 2,485 / 2,405 / 2,181 / 2,182), All potential exporters who have not exported in past 12 months but could (539 / 590 / 556 / 557 / 513), Promote (368 / 351 / 341 / 380 / 365), Reassure (148 / 217 / 196 / 152 / 130)

5. Barriers to exporting – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

This chapter examines what capabilities and capacity businesses have for exporting. In addition, it identifies the extent to which cost, knowledge, capacity, access to contacts, customers, networks, and time taken to comply with export procedures are barriers to exporting. All these questions were asked to businesses who self-reported that their product was at least suitable for export, even if they have not exported before.

Businesses that had ever exported to a core market, or had considered doing so but decided against it, were asked about the barriers to exporting to one of these countries specifically. Other businesses were asked about barriers to exporting more generally. In 2024, the core markets were the USA, Australia, European Union (EU), India and the Gulf States,²⁶ which was a change from when these questions were last asked in 2020 and 2022.²⁷ For this reason, and due to changes in the criteria for selection of markets to follow up on, comparisons with previous waves are limited.

Key findings

- businesses were most confident in having the financial resources (71%), adequate supply chains (70%), capability to assess the cost of exporting (69%) and possessing the staff skills (69%) needed to export. In contrast, only around half (51%) felt they had the capability to assess international competition for products or services
- perceptions of having sufficient staff skills (up from 61% to 69%) and staff capacity (up from 52% to 63%) both improved from 2023, but otherwise the overall picture was consistent year on year
- as in previous years, current and lapsed exporters were more likely to feel they had the capability and capacity for exporting than businesses which had the potential for export but had not yet done so
- time was the strongest barrier to exporting, both to core markets and more generally, with cost and access to contacts, customers and networks also significant barriers. However, cost was seen as less of a barrier in 2024 than it was in 2020 and 2022
- across all areas covered in the survey (time, cost, access, lack of knowledge and capacity), there was an overall decline in the extent to which these were seen as barriers to exporting. This was mainly driven by lapsed exporters who saw these as lesser barriers than they had previously. There was little change among either current or potential exporters

5.1 Capabilities to focus on exporting

Businesses whose goods or services were suitable for export were questioned about the capabilities and capacity they possessed for exporting. This covered businesses in the 'Sustain'

²⁶ The Gulf States was defined as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

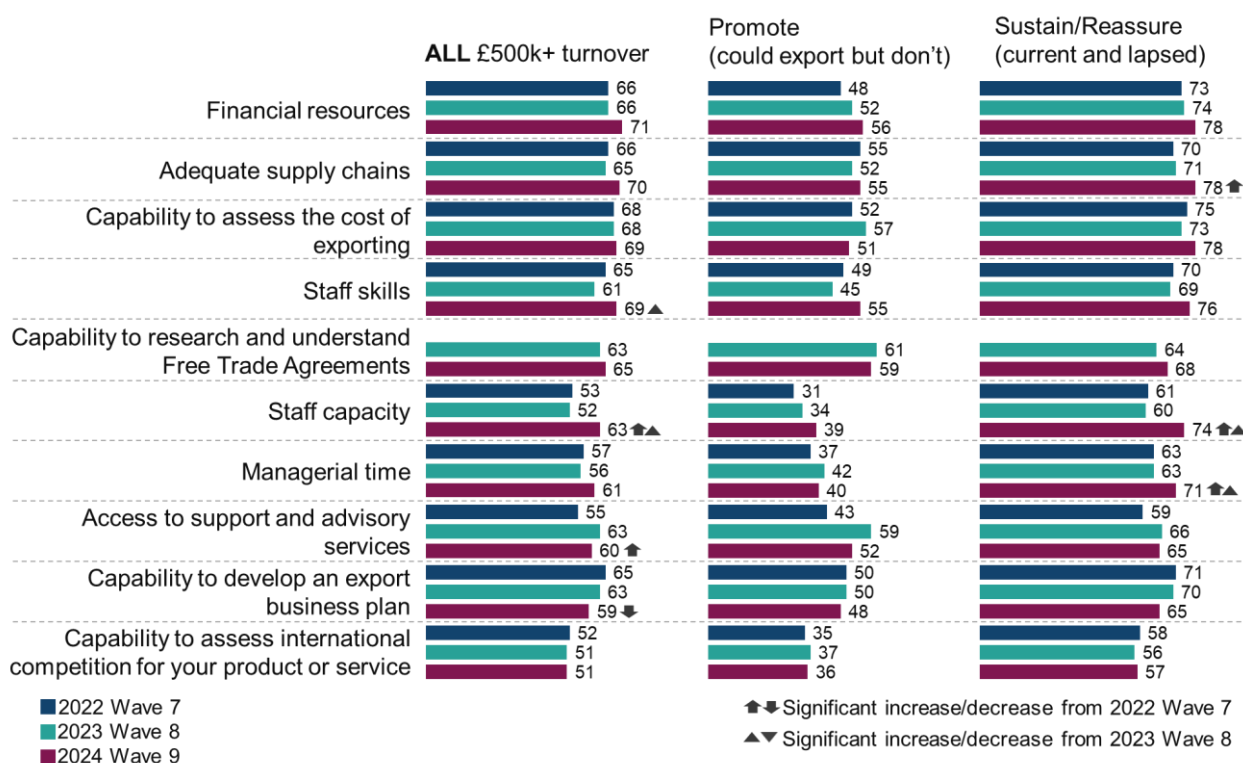
²⁷ In 2020 the core markets were the USA, China, Australia, New Zealand. In 2022 the core markets were the USA, UAE, Canada, India and Mexico.

and 'Reassure' segments, which were current or previous exporters and made up 38% of all £500,000+ businesses, and businesses in the 'Promote'²⁸ segment, who had never exported but whose goods or services could be developed for export, accounting for a further 17% of businesses.

Around 7 in 10 of these businesses felt they had the financial resources (71%), adequate supply chains (70%), capability to assess the cost of exporting (69%) and possessed the staff skills (69%) to export. Having sufficient staff skills (up from 61% in 2023), as well as staff capacity (up from 52% in 2023 to 63% in 2024) both improved over the last year (Figure 5.1).

There was less confidence in having the capability to assess international competition for products or services, with only around half of businesses (51%) stating that they had this.

Figure 5.1: Whether businesses have enough capability and capacity to focus on exporting (% 'yes' of all whose product is suitable for export)



Source: Q31a Thinking about your business' ability to start or continue exporting, does your business have enough of each of the following?

Base: All businesses whose product is suitable for export 2022 W7 / 2023 W8* / 2024 W9*: £500k+ turnover businesses (1,530 / 656 / 635), Promote (341 / 186 / 186), Sustain/Reassure (1,170 / 458 / 426) *Half selected at random

As seen in previous years, current and lapsed exporters (in the 'Sustain' and 'Reassure' segments) were more confident than those in the 'Promote' segment about their capabilities and capacity for export across most areas. As was the case in 2023, the exception was in having the capability to research and understand Free Trade Agreements, where there was no difference between segments.

²⁸ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

By business size, there were very few differences in reported capabilities and capacity across most areas. However, large businesses (with 250+ employees) were less likely than small and medium businesses (with 10 to 249 employees) to feel they had enough staff capacity to start or continue exporting (35% compared with 64%).

5.2 Barriers to exporting to core markets

As described in Section 4.5, the focus for core export markets changes from year to year and in 2024 covered the USA, Australia, European Union (EU), India and the Gulf States. Businesses that had ever exported and had either exported to a core market or had considered doing so but decided against it were asked a number of questions. These questions included rating several areas such as cost, knowledge, capacity, access to contacts, customers and networks, and time taken to comply with export procedures as potential barriers to exporting. If they had exported or considered exporting to more than one core market, then only one of these was asked about, with the priority going to markets that had been considered but had been decided against.

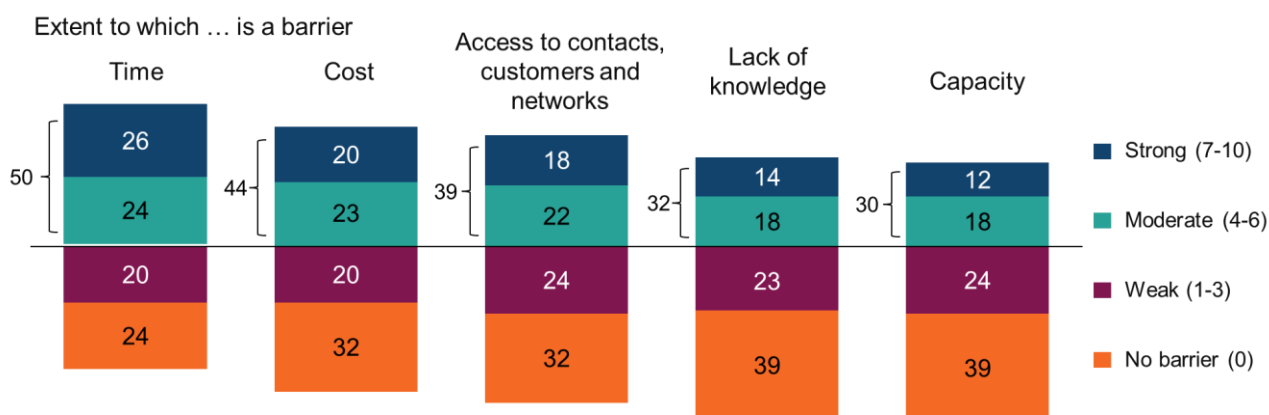
Businesses were asked to assess the extent to which each area was a barrier on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 meaning this element was no barrier at all and 10 meaning it was a very strong barrier. Responses have been grouped into 4 categories: a score of 7 to 10 has been classified as a strong barrier, a score of 4 to 6 is a moderate barrier, a score of 1 to 3 represents a weak barrier and a score of 0 means no barrier at all.

Figure 5.2 shows the combined responses across the 5 core export markets of interest in 2024. Time was seen as the greatest barrier to exporting to core markets, with 1 in 4 respondents feeling this was a strong barrier. Cost and access to contacts, customers and networks were also significant barriers, with around 2 in 10 businesses rating these as strong barriers. Due to the change in core markets²⁹ and the criteria with which respondents were selected to answer these questions,³⁰ it is not advisable to make comparisons between 2024 and when the questions were previously asked in 2020 and 2022. In particular, the inclusion of the EU (the most common export destination) in 2024 has a large impact on comparability as it dominates the results. Despite this, however, 2024 results are broadly in line with those in 2022.

²⁹ In 2020 the core markets were the USA, China, Australia, New Zealand. In 2022 the core markets were the USA, UAE, Canada, India and Mexico.

³⁰ In 2020, respondents were selected to answer these questions if they had ever exported and had considered but decided against exporting to a core market. Unlike in 2022 and 2024, it did not include those who were already exporters to these markets. In 2024 potential exporters were additionally asked about barriers to exporting to core markets (if they had considered doing so), but these responses have not been included here.

Figure 5.2: Barriers to exporting to core markets (% of all respondents who have ever exported and have exported to a core export market or have considered doing so but decided against it)



Source: Q24D. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means it is not a barrier at all and 10 means it is a very strong barrier, how much of a barrier is each of the following when it comes to exporting to [CORE EXPORT MARKET]?

Base: All £500k+ turnover businesses which have ever exported and have exported to a core export market or have considered doing so but decided against it 2024 wave 9: (807)

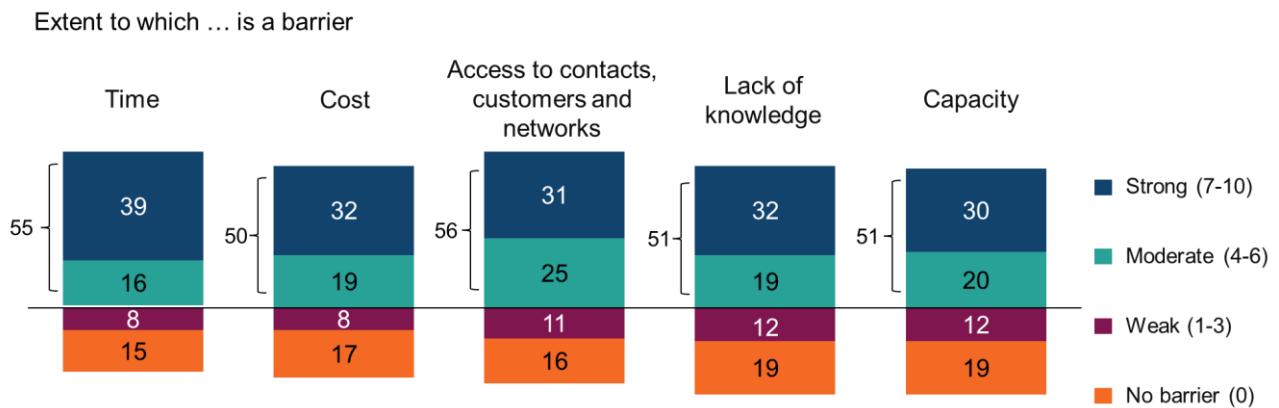
5.3 Barriers to exporting in general

All respondents who had ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export, and who had not been asked about a specific core export market, were asked similar questions about the barriers they faced to exporting. Instead of being asked to think about a particular market, they were asked about the extent to which cost, knowledge, capacity, access to contacts customers and networks, and time taken to comply with export procedures were barriers to exporting in general. Again, due to changes in how respondents were selected for each set of questions, comparisons should not be made with previous years.³¹

As with those asked about exporting to specific markets, time (39%) was the area most likely to be seen as a strong barrier to exporting in general (Figure 5.3). All other areas were felt to be a strong barrier to exporting in general by around 3 in 10 of businesses questioned about this. Across all areas, businesses that were asked about barriers to exporting in general were more likely to give a rating of a 'strong' barrier than those asked about barriers to core export markets. The reason for this difference is not fully clear as it could be due to differing levels of export experience within the 2 respondent groups rather than the different emphasis of the questions.

³¹ A key change for 2024 was that businesses which had the potential but had not previously exported, and had considered exporting to a core market, were asked specifically about barriers to exporting to that core market, whereas in previous years all potential exporters were only asked about barriers to exporting in general.

Figure 5.3: Barriers to exporting in general (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export, and have neither exported to core market nor have considered doing so)

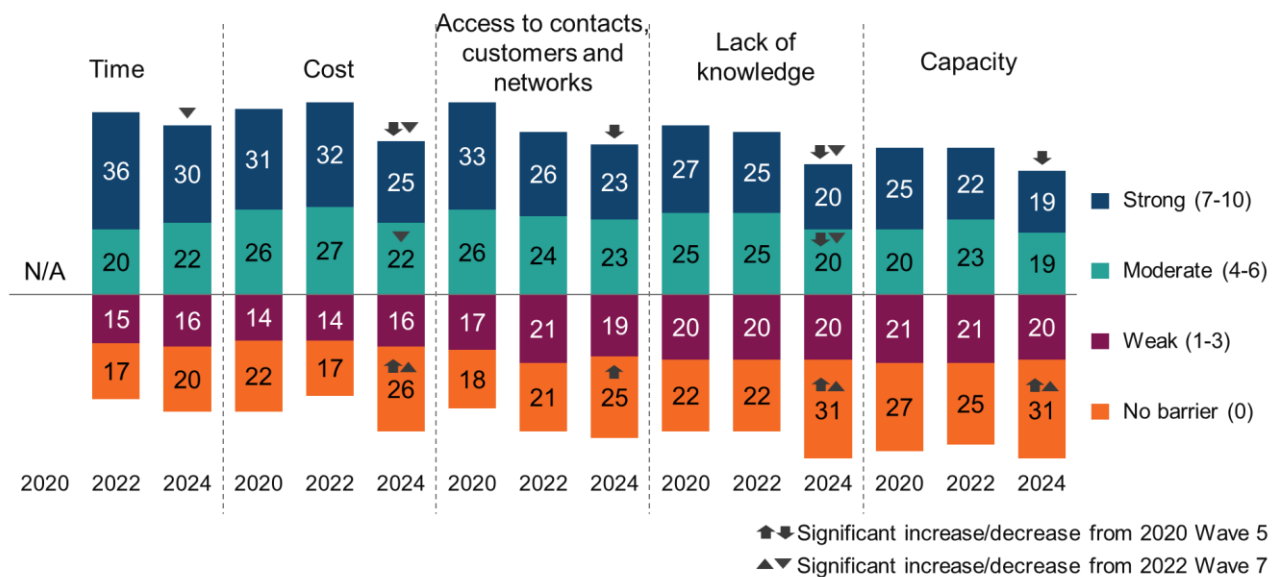


Source: Q24xE. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means it is not a barrier at all and 10 means it is a very strong barrier, how much of a barrier is each of the following when it comes to exporting in general?

Base: All £500k+ turnover businesses which have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export, and have neither exported to a core market nor have considered doing so 2024 wave 9: (365)

Combining the 2 questions into a single measure across all businesses which have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export allows comparisons to be made over time. As shown in Figure 5.4, there was an overall trend for a decline in the extent to which these 5 areas were felt to be barriers to exporting, with fewer businesses rating each of the areas as a strong barrier and more businesses rating them as no barrier at all when compared with previous years in which the questions have been asked.

Figure 5.4: Overall barriers to exporting (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export)



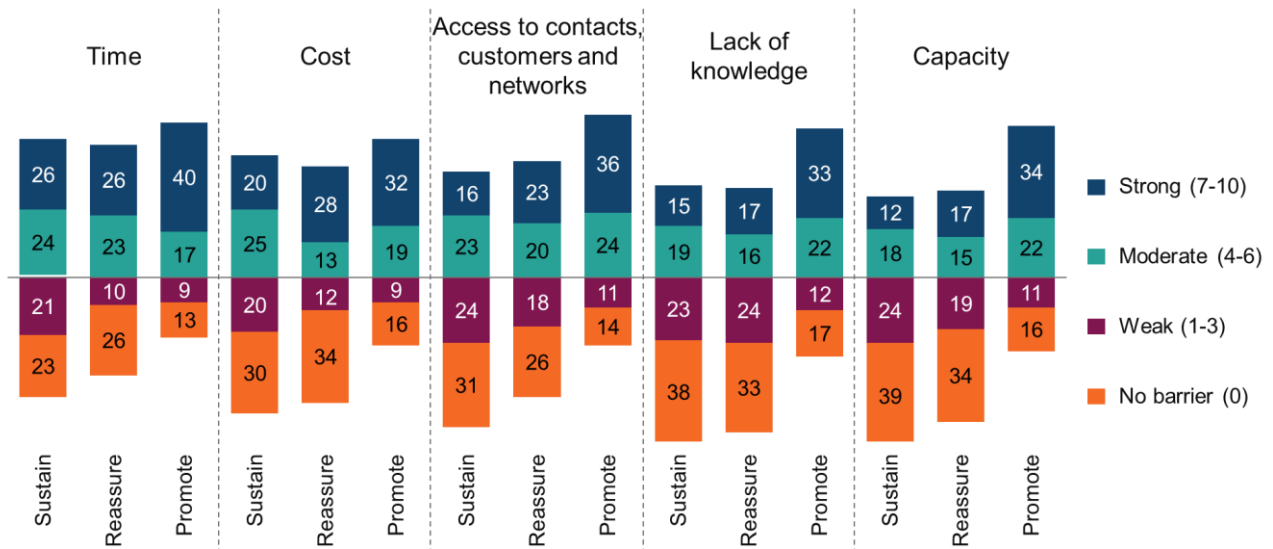
Source: Q24D/Q24xE. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means it is not a barrier at all and 10 means it is a very strong barrier, how much of a barrier is each of the following when it comes to exporting to [CORE EXPORT MARKET]/in general?

Base: All £500k+ turnover businesses which have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export 2020 W5 / 2022 W7 / 2024 W9: (1,271 / 1,511 / 1,252)

Businesses that had the potential to export, but had not yet done so (in the 'Promote' segment), were more likely than current and lapsed exporters to feel they were facing strong barriers to exporting (Figure 5.5). Among these potential exporters, around 1 in 3 rated each of the areas as a strong barrier to exporting, with slightly more (40%) stating that time was a strong barrier. The overall picture in 2024 for potential exporters was broadly similar to that seen in 2022, although cost was seen as less of a barrier in 2024 (32% rated cost as a strong barrier, compared with 43% doing so in 2022).

In 2024, there was little difference between current and lapsed exporters in their ratings for each area being a strong barrier to exporting. This is a different pattern to 2022, when lapsed exporters were more closely aligned with potential exporters, and more likely than current exporters to view each area as a strong barrier to exporting. The overall trend has been a reduction in the extent to which lapsed exporters view each area as a barrier (for example time down from 50% in 2022 to 26% in 2024, and capacity down from 35% in 2022 to 17% in 2024).

Figure 5.5: Overall barriers to exporting - by segment (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export)



Source: Q24D/Q24xE. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means it is not a barrier at all and 10 means it is a very strong barrier, how much of a barrier is each of the following when it comes to exporting to [CORE EXPORT MARKET]/in general?

Base: All £500k+ turnover businesses which have ever exported or whose products or services could be developed for export 2024 wave 9: Sustain (757), Reassure (130), Promote (365)

In 2024 there were few differences in how businesses of different sizes rated the barriers to exporting which they may have faced. However, small (lower band) businesses (with 10 to 19 employees) were the most likely to feel that cost (30%, compared with 25% across all businesses which had exported or whose products or services were suitable) and access to contacts, customers and networks (29%, compared with 23% across all businesses which had exported or whose products or services were suitable) were strong barriers to exporting.

6. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

There were several major Free Trade Agreement related announcements and events in 2024 during this period of NSRB fieldwork. The new Labour government announced in July 2024 its commitment to FTAs, and its intentions to deliver negotiations programmes with the GCC, India, Israel, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Turkey. In December 2024, the UK became the first European nation to accede to the CPTPP trading bloc.

Other key FTA moments throughout the year included the continuation of negotiations with South Korea and Switzerland, as well as the expansion of 'Memorandums of Understanding' (MoUs) with individual US states to promote trade and investment. During 2024, new MoUs were signed with Texas and Colorado, building on the agreements made in 2023 with Oklahoma, Utah, Washington State and Florida. Negotiations with major economies such as India and the Gulf Cooperation Council were also running throughout the year and attracting significant media and political interest.³²

For several years, the NSRB has asked businesses to predict the effects of negotiated FTAs on their business. New questions introduced in 2023 and retained in 2024 asked businesses to describe their knowledge of FTAs and anticipated effects of the agreements, as well as their experiences of FTA benefits. This chapter explores these subjects in turn. It is important to note that these questions were asked at an overall level rather than focussing on specific negotiations or agreements.

The findings in this chapter are reported on businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export. Overall, the findings from this chapter indicate that most have heard of FTAs (79%) and almost a quarter (23%) know something about them. There was agreement from 56% of those surveyed that FTAs will benefit their business, but fewer agree they are confident they would know how to trade through an FTA (35%) or that the government is providing information and support to help businesses access FTA benefits (21%). This suggests a need for DBT to provide further information and support in these areas to help businesses capitalise on benefits.

Three in 4 businesses who were eligible for an FTA benefit said their goods or services did in fact benefit from it (75%). Among both exporters (31%) and importers (27%), reduced customs duties were the benefit businesses most frequently cited being eligible for. All businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export were asked where they would go for information and support relating to FTAs, with the most mentioned source being GOV.UK (81%). This was followed by business or professional contacts (64%) and the UK government (62%).

³² For further information on trade agreements signed and being negotiated by the UK, visit the GOV.UK webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-uks-trade-agreements>

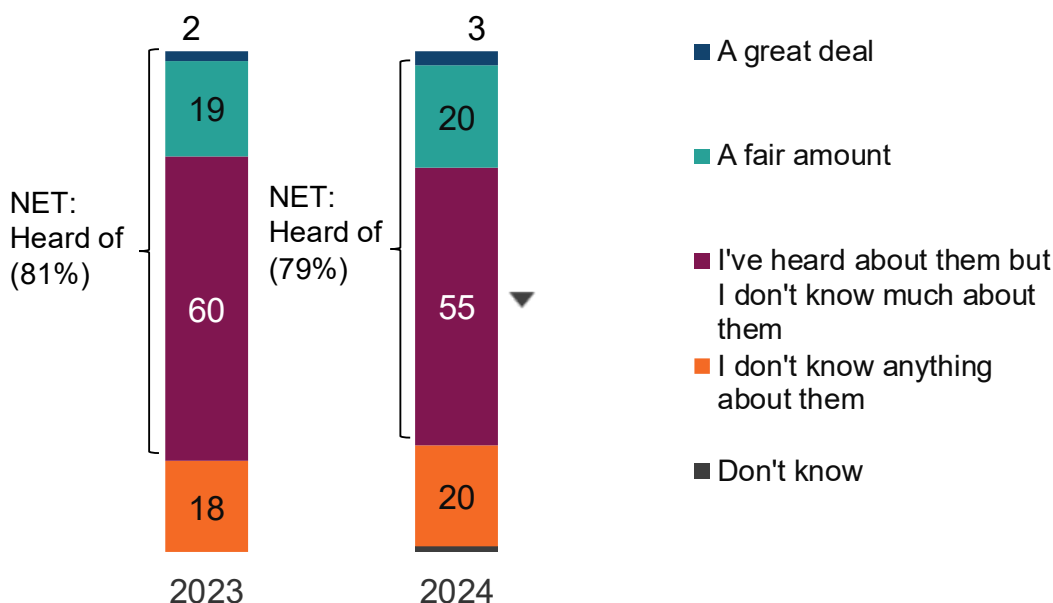
Key findings

- among businesses who have ever exported or whose product could be developed for export, 79% had heard of FTAs. Almost a quarter (23%) knew a 'great deal' or 'fair amount' about them, consistent with 2023
- over half of exporters and potential exporters (56%) agreed that FTAs will benefit their business. Fewer agreed that they would know how to trade through an FTA (35%) or that the government is providing information and support to help businesses access FTA benefits (21%)
- GOV.UK remained the most cited source of information and support relating to FTAs (81%), though mentions of the UK Government, including DBT, increased in 2024 (62%, up from 55% in 2023)
- over half of exporters and potential exporters said their exports are eligible for any FTA benefits (54%). Among those eligible, 75% said they benefited, including 43% who said they benefited always or most of the time
- reduced customs duties was the FTA benefit businesses most frequently cited being eligible for, among both exporters (31%) and importers (27%)

6.1 Knowledge of FTAs

In 2024, all businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export were asked about their level of knowledge of FTAs. Overall, almost 4 in 5 (79%) businesses had heard of FTAs, with 55% not knowing much about them, 20% knowing 'a fair amount', and just 3% knowing 'a great deal' (Figure 6.1). Generally, levels of knowledge remained aligned with 2023, but there was a decrease in 2024 (60% to 55%) for those who didn't know much about FTAs.

Figure 6.1: Level of knowledge about FTAs (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export)



▲▼ Significant increase/decrease from 2023 Wave 8

Source: FTA1. How much do you know about the UK's Free Trade Agreements?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,337 / 1,252)

Looking further at individual segments, businesses in the 'Sustain' (27%) and 'Reassure' (28%) segments were more likely to say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about FTAs, compared with those in the 'Promote' (15%) segment.

Businesses in Northern Ireland were more likely to report knowing something about FTAs (34%) compared to those in the Midlands (20%), London (20%) and Scotland (19%). Businesses with a turnover of £10,000,000 to £49,999,999 were also more likely to report knowing something about FTAs (35%) compared with businesses with a turnover of less than £10 million (23%).

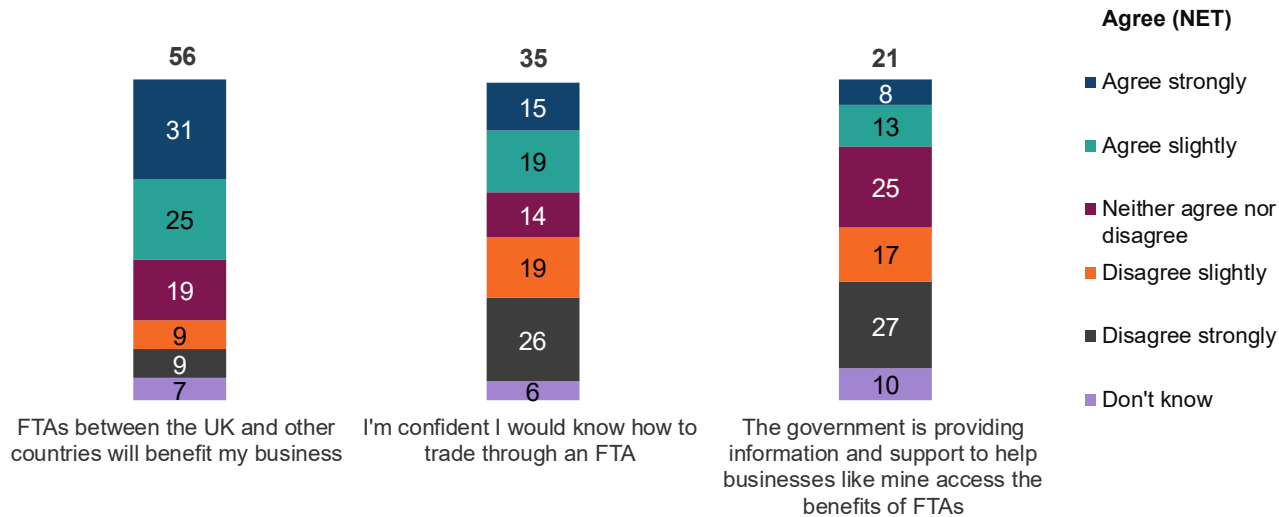
Among exporters or potential exporters (Sustain and Reassure) who have ever imported, 82% had heard of FTAs, with 54% not knowing much about them, 24% knowing 'a fair amount' and 4% knowing 'a great deal'. Knowledge was lower among non-importers, 71% had heard of them, with 57% not knowing much about them, 12% knowing 'a fair amount' and just 2% knowing 'a great deal'.

6.2 Expected effects of FTAs

Exporters and potential exporters were then asked their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to FTAs.

As shown in Figure 6.2, 56% of businesses agreed that FTAs will benefit their business. Over a third agreed they were confident that they would know how to trade through an FTA (35%), while 21% agreed that the government is providing information and support to help businesses like theirs access the benefits of FTAs. Agreement levels in 2024 remained consistent with 2023 levels. This suggests a continued need for DBT to provide further information and support to businesses on trading through an FTA and accessing benefits.

Figure 6.2: Agreement with FTA statements (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export)



Source: FTA5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to Free Trade Agreements?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export: 2024 wave 9 (1,252)

Businesses who had ever exported ('Sustain' and 'Reassure') were more likely to agree that FTAs would benefit their business (61%) than potential exporters ('Promote' 46%). Businesses with a turnover of between £5,000,000 and £49,999,999 were more likely (68%) to agree that FTAs would benefit their business than those with a turnover of less than £2,000,000 (53%).

Similarly, businesses who had ever exported ('Sustain' and 'Reassure') were more likely to agree that they felt confident in knowing how to trade through an FTA (39%) than potential exporters ('Promote' 24%).

Current exporters (Sustain) were more likely (48%) to say that they disagreed that the government is providing information and support to help business like theirs access the benefits of FTAs than those who exported more than 12 months ago (32%) and potential exporters (41%). Exploring geographic differences, businesses in Northern Ireland were more likely to agree (35%) that the government is providing enough information and support, compared to Great Britain as a whole (20%), and all individual regions.

SMEs were more likely to disagree that the government is providing information and support to help business like theirs access the benefits of FTAs (44%) compared to large businesses (20%). This suggests DBT should continue to further target the SME group in their communications surrounding FTAs.

Exporters and potential exporters who had ever **imported** were more likely (62%) to agree that FTAs will benefit their business (compared with 45% of non-importers); 41% agreed they felt confident that they would know how to trade through an FTA (compared with 20% of non-importers) and 24% agreed that the government is providing information and support to help businesses like theirs access the benefits of FTAs (compared with 16% of non-importers).

6.3 Information and support relating to FTAs

Businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export were subsequently asked where they would go to find information and support relating to FTAs. Figure 6.3 shows that most businesses (81%) would visit GOV.UK. Almost two thirds of businesses would go to business or professional contacts (64%), the UK government (62%, up from 55% in 2023), and over half would go to trade bodies and business groups (51%).

Current exporters ('Sustain' segment) were more likely to seek information from business or professional contacts (66%) and freight, parcel, or logistics specialists (52%) than potential exporters ('Promote' segment) (55% and 40% respectively).

Among businesses who have ever imported, 54% would go to a freight, parcel, or logistics specialist for information about FTAs, compared with 33% of those who have never imported.

Figure 6.3: Sources of information and support relating to FTAs (% of all respondents who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export)



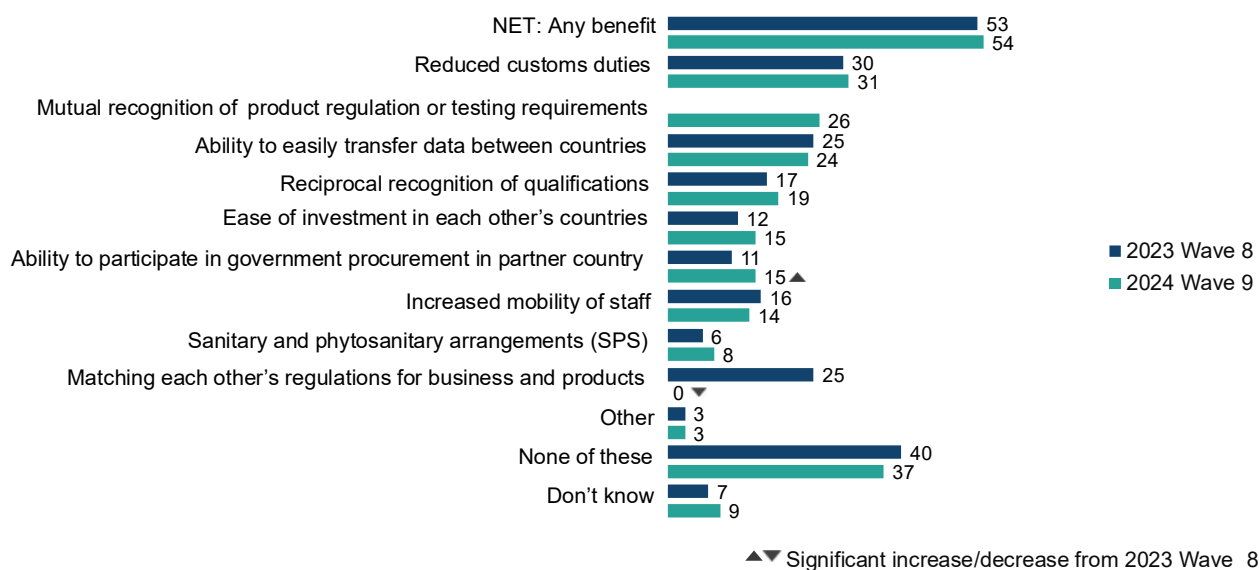
Source: FTA6. Where would you go to find information and support relating to Free Trade Agreements?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export (random half sample at W9): 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,337 / 613)

6.4 Experience of FTA benefits

Businesses who had exported before were asked about which benefits their goods or services were eligible for. Just over half (54%) said they were eligible for any benefit, with 31% citing eligibility for reduced customs duties and around a quarter mentioning the mutual recognition of product regulation (26%), and the ability to easily transfer data between countries (24%), as shown in Figure 6.4. More businesses mentioned eligibility for the ability to participate in government procurement in partner countries in 2024 (15%), compared with 11% in 2023.

Figure 6.4: Eligibility for FTA benefits (% of respondents who have ever exported)

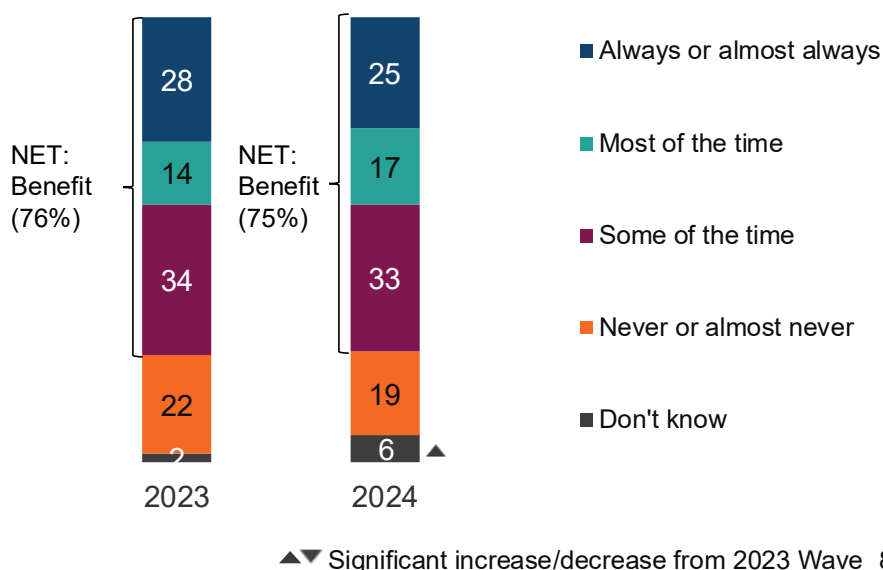


Source: FTA2. Thinking about the goods or services you most frequently export, are they eligible for any of the following benefits?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have ever exported: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (957 / 887)

Businesses who said their goods or services were eligible for any of the above listed benefits were then asked how often they benefit. Three quarters of these businesses said they do benefit (75%), with 43% benefiting most of the time or always. Just under 1 in 5 (19%) said they never or almost never benefit; see Figure 6.5. When examining each type of benefit by the frequency that businesses report benefitting from them there was a lot of variation. Businesses were least likely to report benefiting from the ease of investment in each other's countries (37%) and were most likely to report benefiting from the ability to easily transfer data between countries (89%).

Figure 6.5: How often goods/services benefit (% of respondents whose goods or services are eligible for any listed benefit)



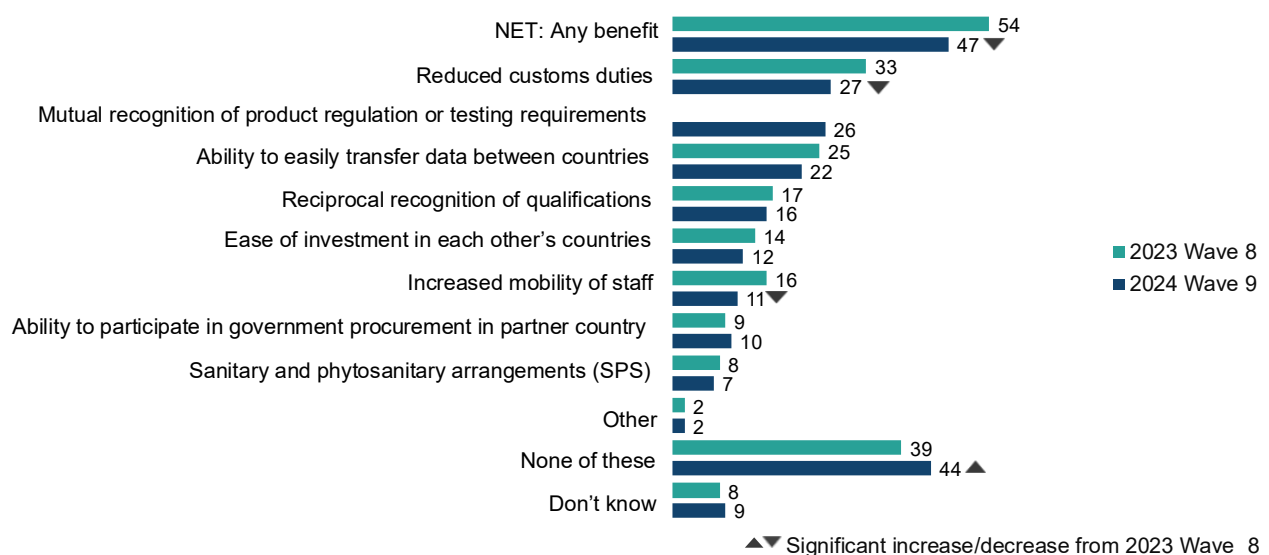
Source: FTA3. How often do the goods or services you export benefit from this?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have exported and whose goods or services are eligible for at least one of the listed benefits: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (520 / 482)

Businesses who said they had imported before were also asked about the benefit eligibility of their goods or services. There was a decrease in importers reporting eligibility for any benefit (47% compared to 54% in 2023) and a corresponding increase in importers reporting that they are eligible for none of the listed benefits (44% compared to 39% in 2023). The proportion of businesses citing eligibility for any benefit was highest in Q2 (59%), then decreasing in Q3Q4 (38%).

Similar to exporters, the benefit of reduced customs duties was cited by just over 1 in 4 businesses (27%), though this was also a decrease compared with 2023 (33%), followed by the mutual recognition of product regulation or testing requirements (26%) and ability to easily transfer data between countries (22%), see Figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6: Eligibility for FTA benefits (% of respondents who have ever imported)



Source: FTA4. Thinking about the goods or services you most frequently import, are they eligible for any of the following benefits?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses who have ever imported: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,138 / 1,100)

7. Supply Chains – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

Understanding the supply chain disruptions facing businesses and the impact they have on their ability to export is a priority for DBT, particularly so in the context of COVID-19, EU Exit, and other global challenges.

This chapter focuses on businesses' experience of supply chains disruptions, what disruptions these were, and if and how they were resolved.

Overall, the findings from this chapter show that just over half of businesses (53%) have experienced supply chain disruptions. Those who were currently experiencing disruptions or had in the last 3 years were asked what they believe caused them. COVID-19 and EU Exit were the most cited cause for supply chain disruptions, both mentioned by 63% of businesses who had supply chain disruptions, followed by general economic or inflationary pressure (50%). Of businesses who had resolved disruptions they faced, around 2 in 5 resolved these by finding alternative suppliers (42%) or simply waiting until matters resolved themselves (35%). Over two thirds (70%) of businesses who believe their products or services could be exported said they had adequate supply chains to start or continue exporting.

Key findings

- just over half of businesses (53%) said they had experienced supply chain disruptions, with one third reporting that the disruptions were now resolved (34%) and one in five reporting that they were still experiencing them (19%). On the other hand, 19% had never experienced disruptions and 26% do not have a supply chain
- businesses in the 'Sustain' or 'Reassure' segments were more likely to have experienced supply chain disruptions (57%) than those in the 'Promote' or 'Challenge' segments (51%)
- quarters 3 and 4 of 2024 saw a lower proportion of businesses saying they had experienced supply chain disruptions (49%), compared with Quarters 1 and 2 (58%). This could be because of more time having passed since the coronavirus outbreak, which caused a large proportion of these disruptions
- COVID-19 and EU Exit were the most cited cause for supply chain disruptions, mentioned by 63% of businesses who had supply chain disruptions
- businesses who had ever exported were more likely to mention EU Exit as a cause of disruptions (73%) than those who had never exported (59%). They were also more likely to cite the cost of shipping (56% compared with 43%)
- just under 2 in 5 businesses who had resolved the disruptions they had experienced (42%) said they found alternative suppliers, with 15% of these being in the UK and 5% overseas. A similar proportion (35%) said they had to wait until matters resolved themselves, and just 2% received advice or support from any sources to resolve the disruptions
- of businesses who believe their products or services could be exported, 7 in 10 (70%) said they had adequate supply chains to start or continue exporting, one in five (21%) said they did not, and 9% said they did not know

7.1 Experiences with supply chains

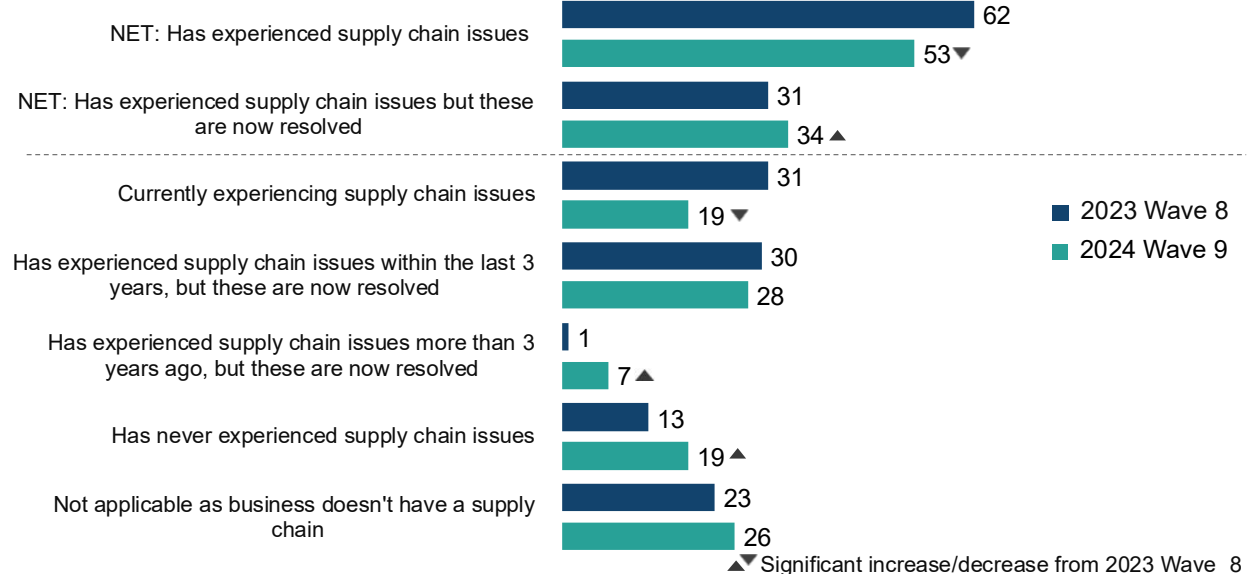
In 2024, all businesses were asked about their experience with supply chains. Just over half (53%) said they had experienced supply chain disruptions. This represents a decrease from 62% in 2023; see Figure 7.1. Around 1 in 3 (34%) said that they had experienced disruptions but that they are now resolved, an increase from 31% in 2023. Around 1 in 5 (19%) are currently experiencing

supply chain disruptions, down from 31% in 2023. Meanwhile, 19% had never experienced supply chain disruptions (up from 13% in 2023), while 26% said they do not have a supply chain.

Businesses in the ‘Sustain’ or ‘Reassure’ segments were more likely to have experienced supply chain disruptions (57%) than those in the ‘Promote’ or ‘Challenge’ segments (51%). Businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (74%) and manufacturing, raw materials, and energy sector (67%) were also more likely to have experienced disruptions than other sectors.

Quarters 3 and 4 of 2024 saw a lower proportion of businesses saying they had experienced supply chain disruptions (49%), compared with quarters 1 and 2 (58%). This could be due to a longer period of time having passed since the coronavirus outbreak, which was cited as one of the main causes of current disruptions by 66% in quarters 1 and 2 and 59% in quarters 3 and 4. This is a reduction throughout this wave, suggesting that disruptions resulting from COVID-19 were continuing to decline.

Figure 7.1: Businesses’ experience of supply chains (% of all respondents)



Source: SCHAIN1. Which of the following best describes your business's experience of supply chains?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (2,181 / 2,182)

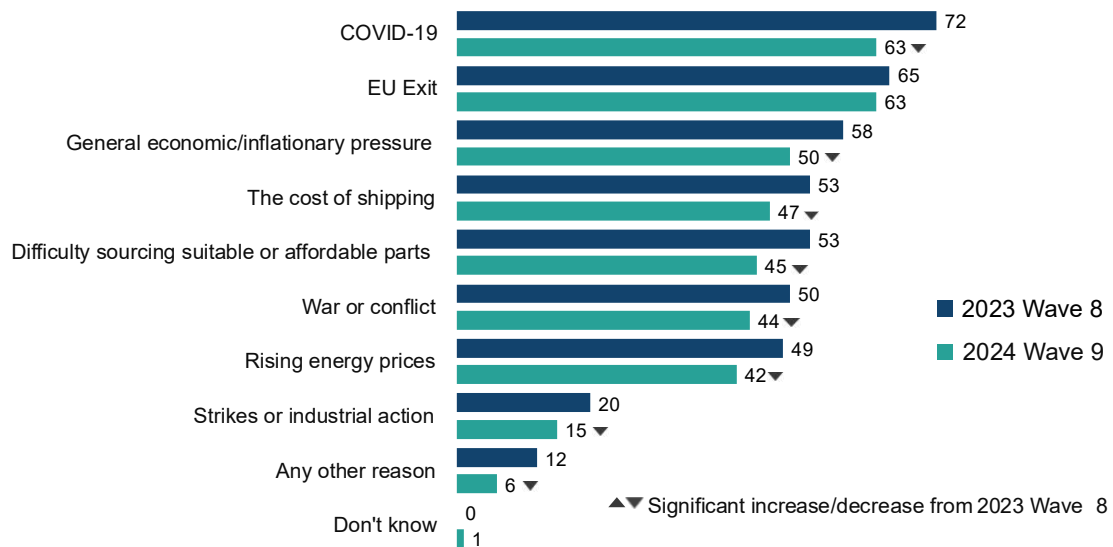
7.2 Supply chain disruptions and resolutions

Businesses who said they had experienced supply chain disruptions in the last 3 years or were currently experiencing them were asked what they felt caused these issues. COVID-19 was cited as a cause for supply chain disruptions by 63% of businesses. This is a decrease from 72% in 2023; see Figure 7.2. The same proportion also cited EU Exit (63%).

Around half mentioned general economic or inflationary pressure (50%), the cost of shipping (47%), difficulty sourcing suitable or affordable parts (45%) or war or conflict (44%). Around 4 in 10 mentioned rising energy prices (42%) and 15% cited strikes or industrial action. The proportions who cited these were all significantly lower than in 2023, indicating that supply chain disruptions as a whole improved in 2024. All other reasons for supply chain disruptions mentioned were less than 5%.

Businesses who had ever exported (in the ‘Sustain’ or ‘Reassure’ segments) were more likely to cite EU Exit as a cause (70%) than those who have never exported (in the ‘Promote’ or ‘Challenge’ segments; 59%). They were also more likely to cite the cost of shipping (53% compared with 43%).

Figure 7.2: Cause of supply chain issues (% of respondents currently experiencing supply chain issues, or have experienced them within the last 3 years)



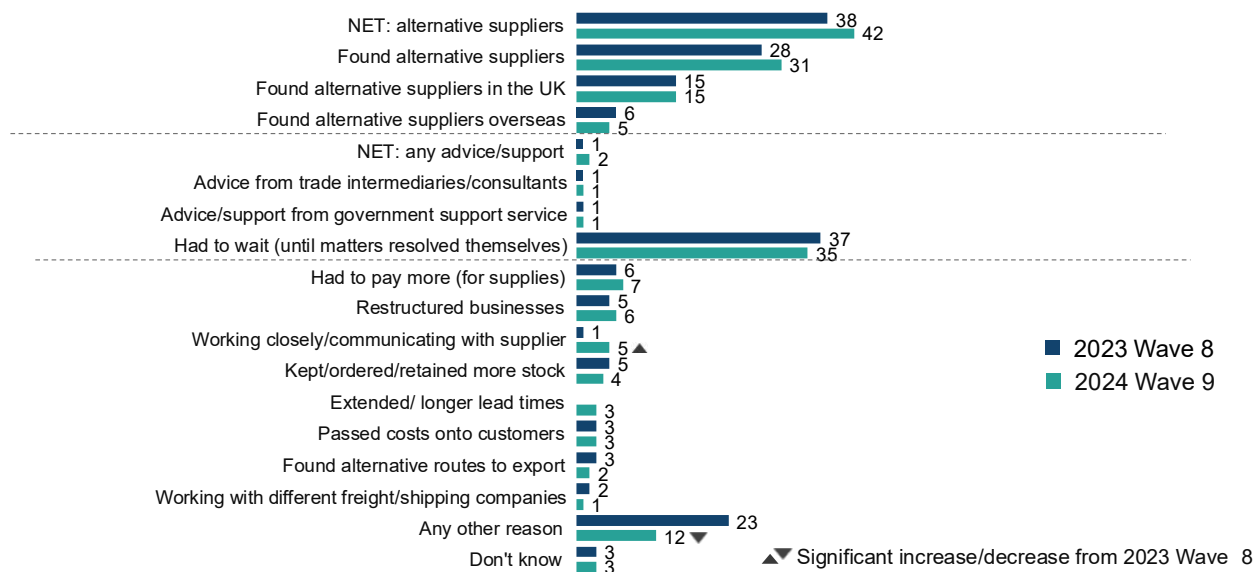
Source: SCHAIN2. Which of the following do you feel caused the supply chain issues you are currently experiencing / experienced within the last few years?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses currently experiencing supply chain issues, or have experienced them within the last 3 years: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,374 / 1,077)

All businesses who had experienced supply chain disruption within the last 3 years, but had now resolved them, were asked how they were resolved. As seen in Figure 7.3, just over 2 in 5 businesses (42%) said they found alternative suppliers, with 15% of these being in the UK and 5% overseas. A similar proportion (35%) said they had to wait until matters resolved themselves, and just 2% received any advice or support to resolve the issue.

Businesses in Northern Ireland were more likely to have used either alternative suppliers, routes to export or freight or shipping companies (64%) than those in Great Britain (43%).

Figure 7.3: How supply chain issues were resolved (% of respondents who have experienced supply chain issues within the last 3 years, which are now resolved)



Source: SCHAIN3. How were you able to resolve the supply chain issues you experienced in the last few years?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses who have experienced supply chain issues within the last 3 years, which are now resolved: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (666 / 632)

7.3 Having adequate supply chains to start and continue exporting

Along with several other capabilities and resources, businesses with an exportable product or service were asked whether they had adequate supply chains to start or continue exporting. Over two thirds (70%) said that they had adequate supply chains, just over 1 in 5 (21%) said they did not, and 9% said they did not know. Those who had exported (in the 'Sustain' or 'Reassure' segments) were more likely to say they had adequate supply chains (78%) than those who had not (in the 'Promote or challenge' segment; 55%).

8. Knowledge, information and support – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

To be effective exporters, businesses need good levels of knowledge about exporting as well as where to go for help, information and support. It is also necessary for businesses to be willing to seek advice and support. This chapter looks at knowledge levels for exporting-related topics as well as use of and interest in using support and advice from DBT, the government, and other sources.

Overall, the findings from this chapter substantiate conclusions from previous chapters that businesses have knowledge gaps in relation to exporting, including how to export and where to go for information, help or advice. Businesses have continued to use internet searches, government websites and personal connections (including friends, colleagues, business associates and informal connections) to source information.

Key findings

- a fifth of businesses had a high level of knowledge of how to export (20%), a decrease from 2020 (26%) and 2022 (24%). A greater proportion (31%) reported low knowledge, an increase from 2022 (23%)
- of businesses who have exported or could export, over 2 in 5 (43%) reported having ever sought advice or information about exporting from any source, an increase from 33% in 2020
- of businesses who have exported or could export, just over 7 in 10 (72%) were aware of any UK government trade support services, a decrease from 2022 (78%) and 2023 (77%). Under half had used any of these services (45%), a decrease from 2022 (52%). GOV.UK tools were the most popular (used by 32% of businesses who have ever exported or could export) but this was also a decrease from 2023 (45%)
- businesses in the 'Promote'³³ segment (those that have not exported before but have a suitable product) were more likely to rate their knowledge as low with regards to how to export (57%), where to go for information (38%) and where to go for help and support with exporting (37%). Businesses in the 'Reassure' segment (those who had exported more than 12 months ago, but not in the past 12 months) were more confident, with 25% rating their knowledge on where to go for information about exporting, and where to go for help and support as low

³³ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

8.1 Current knowledge about exporting

Businesses that had exported or saw their goods or services as suitable for export ('Sustain', 'Reassure' and 'Promote' segments)³⁴ were asked to self-assess their level of knowledge about various aspects of exporting on a 0 to 10 scale. In this section their responses have been grouped into 3 bands:

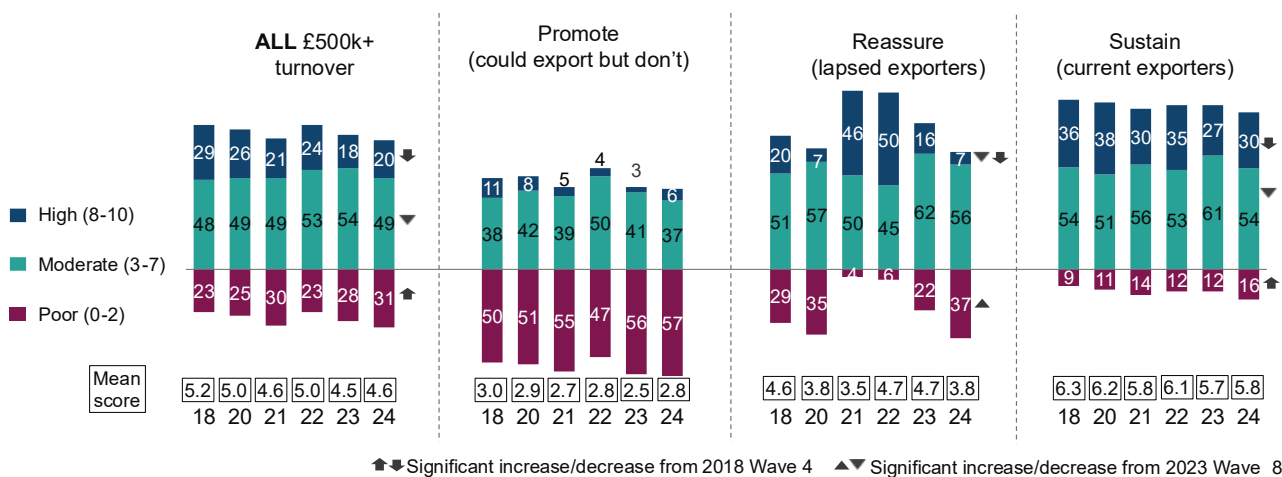
- a score of 8 to 10 has been classified as a 'high level of knowledge'
- a score of 3 to 7 is classified as a 'moderate knowledge level'
- a score of 0 to 2 represents 'poor or no knowledge'

As shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, 1 in 5 businesses who do or could export felt they had a high level of knowledge about how to export (20%). This represents a stabilisation since 2023 (18%), following a year-on-year decline from a peak of 35% in 2017 (see figure 8.2).

Correspondingly, almost a third (31%) reported having poor knowledge of how to export in 2024, which while stable since 2023, is an increase from 2022 (23%). Over the past few years, the proportion reporting a moderate level of knowledge had been increasing, in 2024, this decreased to 49% (from 54% in 2023), dropping back to 2018 levels.

Businesses in the 'Sustain' segment were more likely to score their knowledge about how to export highly (30%) than 'Reassure' (7%) or 'Promote' (6%).

Figure 8.1: Description of current knowledge about how to export (% of all who could export)

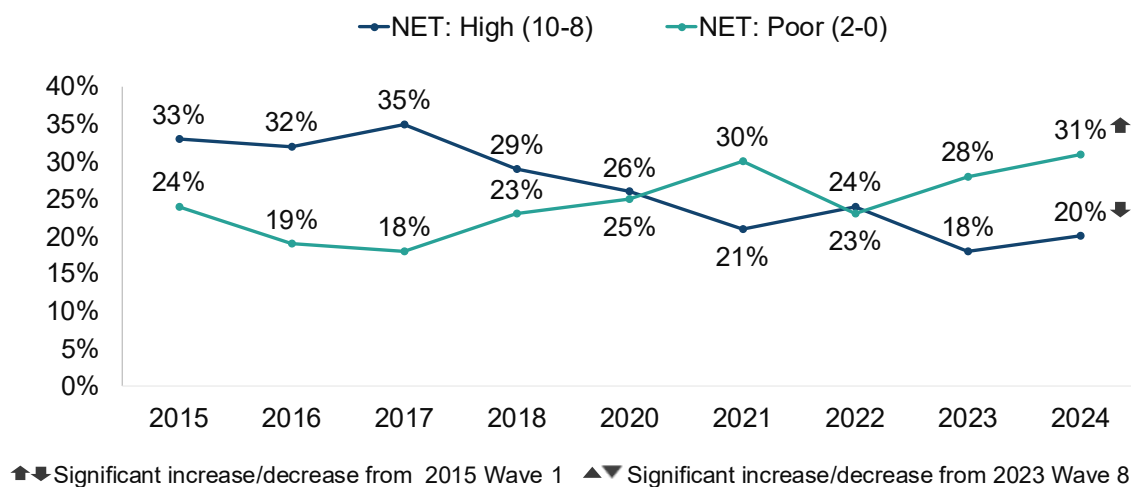


Source: Q30 (EXP_KNOW). On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you have very good knowledge and 0 means you have no knowledge at all, how would you describe: Your knowledge of HOW to export

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses for whom exporting is possible 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: (1,510 / 1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270); Promote (283 / 368 / 351 / 341 / 380 / 365), Reassure (126 / 148 / 217 / 196 / 152 / 130), Sustain (917 / 1,025 / 1052 / 974 / 805 / 757)

³⁴ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

Figure 8.2: Time series for description of current knowledge about how to export (% of all who could export)



Source: Q30: EXP_KNOW: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you have very good knowledge and 0 means you have no knowledge at all, how would you describe: Your knowledge about HOW to export

Base: All respondents with an annual turnover of £500,000+, excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export: 2015 W1 / 2016 W2 / 2017 W3 / 2018 W4 / 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9 (650 / 656 / 1,575 / 1,510 / 1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270)

8.2 Knowledge about where to go for information, help and support

Businesses that had exported or saw their goods or services as suitable for export were also asked to self-assess their level of knowledge about where to go for information, help and support about exporting.

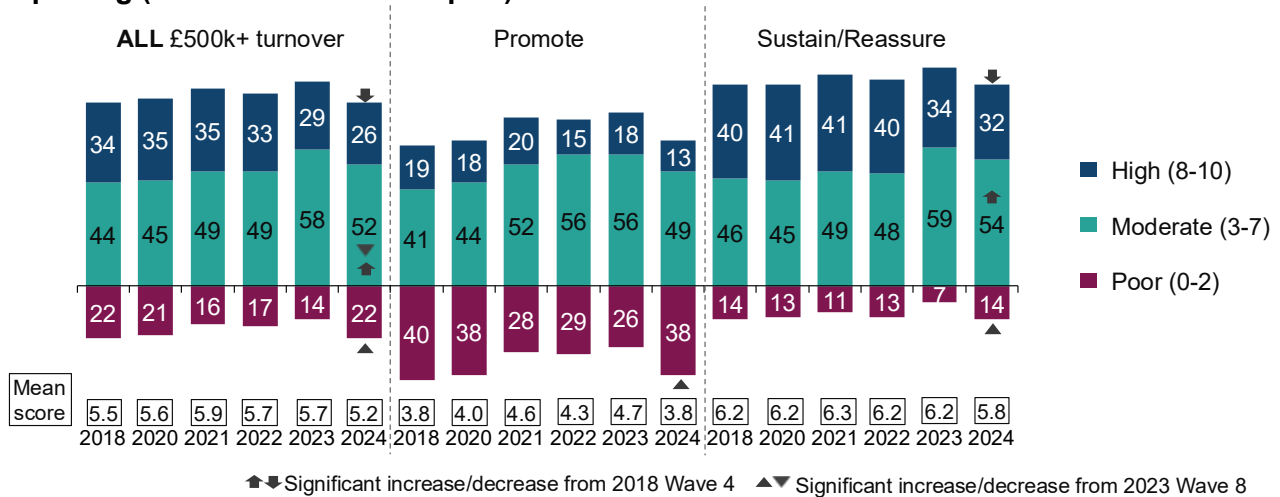
As shown in Figures 8.3, 8.4, and 8.5, in 2024 there has been an increase in businesses reporting **low** knowledge about where to go for information about exporting (22%, compared with 14% in 2023), and help and support with exporting (23% compared with 15% in 2023). Correspondingly, the proportion of businesses reporting high knowledge has decreased. In 2024 around 1 in 4 businesses felt they had a high level of knowledge about where to go for information on exporting (26%) or help and support (25%). These figures are both declines since 2018 (34% and 32% respectively), and the lowest ever reported. The proportion of those reporting a moderate level of knowledge about where to go for information about exporting (52%) and help and support with exporting (52%) has decreased since 2023 (58% and 57% respectively), but overall, an upwards trend remains, with an increase from 2018 (44% and 46% respectively).

Among the 'Promote' segment, across the period 2018 to 2023, the proportion of businesses who reported **moderate** knowledge of where to go for information on exporting has increased from 41% to 56%, with 2024 seeing a decrease, but not significantly so, to 49%. The proportion of this segment reporting low levels of knowledge had gradually declined from 40% in 2018 to 26% in 2023, but has seen a sharp increase in 2024 to 38% back to levels comparable with 2018.

Those in the 'Promote' segment remained more likely to rate their knowledge of where to go for information or help and support as lower than those in the 'Sustain'³⁵ and 'Reassure'³⁵ above segments. 'Sustain/Reassure' businesses were more likely to report a high level of knowledge of where to go for information on exporting than those in the 'Promote' segment (32% compared with 13%).

Mean scores on where to go for information and help and support remained stable across the year. See Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4 for mean scores across waves.

Figure 8.3: Description of current knowledge about: where to go for information about exporting (% of all who could export)

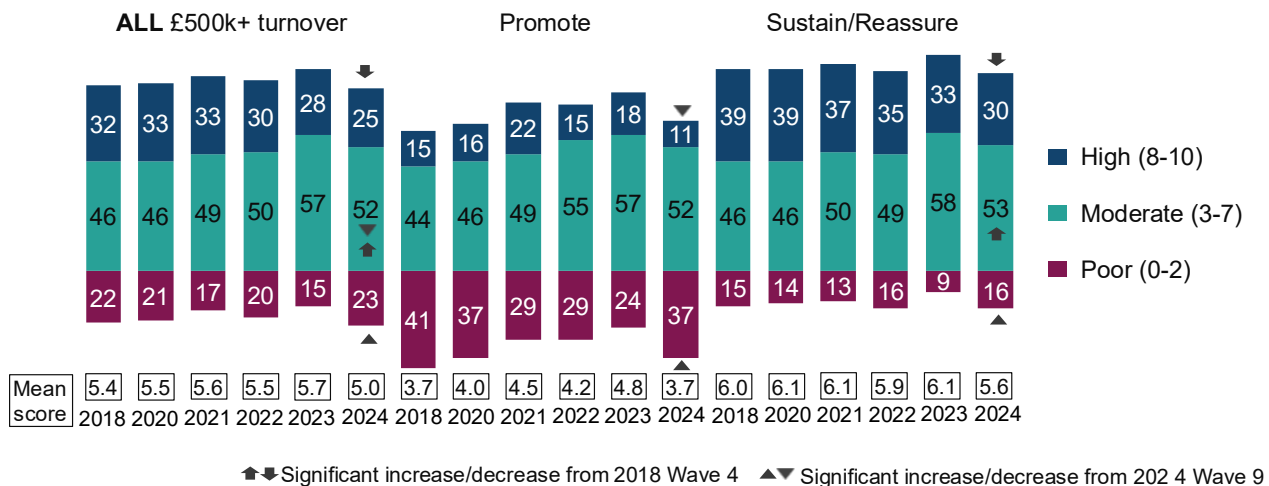


Source: Q30 (EXP_KNOW). On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you have very good knowledge and 0 means you have no knowledge at all, how would you describe: Your knowledge of where to go for INFORMATION about exporting

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses for whom exporting is possible 2018 W4 / 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: (1,510 / 1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270); Promote (283 / 368 / 351 / 341 / 380 / 365), Sustain/Reassure (1,043 / 1,173 / 1,269 / 1,170 / 957 / 887)

³⁵ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

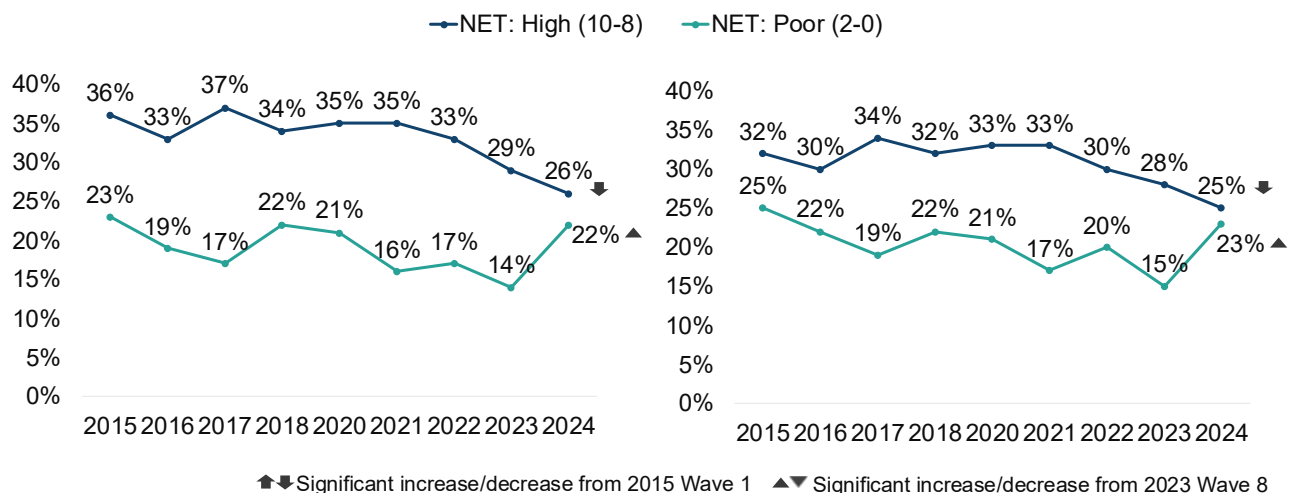
Figure 8.4: Description of current knowledge about: where to go for help and support with exporting (% of all who could export)



Source: Q30 (EXP_KNOW). On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you have very good knowledge and 0 means you have no knowledge at all, how would you describe: Your knowledge of where to go for HELP AND SUPPORT with exporting

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses for whom exporting is possible 2018 W4 / 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8: (1,510 / 1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270); Promote (283 / 368 / 351 / 341 / 380 / 365), Sustain/Reassure (1,043 / 1,173 / 1,269 / 1,170 / 957 / 887)

Figure 8.5: Time series for description of current knowledge about: where to go for information about / help and support with exporting (% of all who could export)



Source: Q30 (EXP_KNOW). On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you have very good knowledge and 0 means you have no knowledge at all, how would you describe: Your knowledge of where to go for INFORMATION about exporting / Your knowledge of where to go for HELP AND SUPPORT with exporting

Base: All respondents with an annual turnover of £500,000+ excluding those whose products / services would never be suitable for export: 2015 wave 1 (650), 2016 wave 2 (656), 2017 wave 3 (1,575), 2018 wave 4 (1,510), 2020 wave 5 (1,564), 2021 wave 6 (1,642), 2022 wave 7 (1,530), 2023 wave 8 (1,362), 2024 wave 9 (1,270)

8.3 Interest in support and advice about exporting

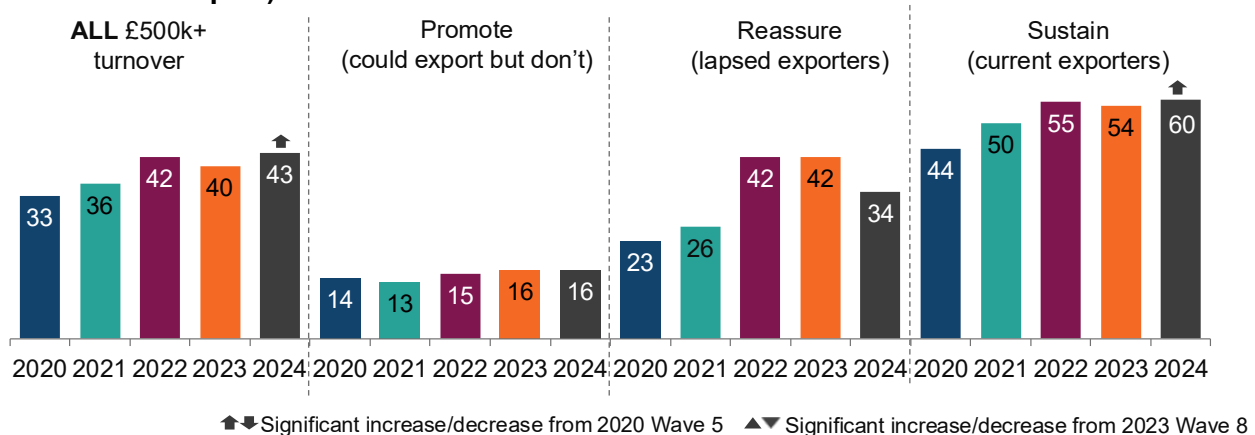
Among businesses that had previously exported or who identified their goods or services as suitable for export, over 2 in 5 (43%) said they had previously sought advice about exporting. This represents an increase from 2020 (33%, see Figure 8.6) though not significantly different from 2023.

The percentage of businesses seeking advice and support was greatest in the 'Sustain' segment compared with the other segments, having risen since 2020 from 44%, to 60% in 2024. The proportion of businesses accessing information and support within the 'Reassure' segment has decreased, though not significantly so, from 42% in 2023 to 34% in 2024. Within the 'Promote' segment, the proportion of businesses seeking advice has been relatively stable since 2020 (14% in 2020, 16% in 2024).

Businesses in the North East (56%) and East of England (52%) were most likely to report they had ever sought out advice or support about exporting, with businesses in London being least likely (36%). Businesses in the manufacturing sector and the wholesale and retail sector were more likely to have sought support (52% and 50% respectively) compared with those in construction and real estate (26%), financial and insurance (25%), education and health (16%), information and communication (33%) and the professional and services (38%) sectors.

Businesses saying they have sought advice or support about exporting remained stable across quarters (between 43% and 44%).

Figure 8.6: Whether businesses have ever sought advice and support about exporting (% of all who could export)



Source: Q33 (EXPAD_B). Have you ever sought advice and support about exporting?

Base: All £500,000+ turnover businesses for whom exporting is possible 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8: (1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270); Promote (368 / 351 / 341 / 380 / 365), Reassure (148 / 217 / 196 / 152 / 130), Sustain (1,025 / 1,052 / 974 / 805 / 757)

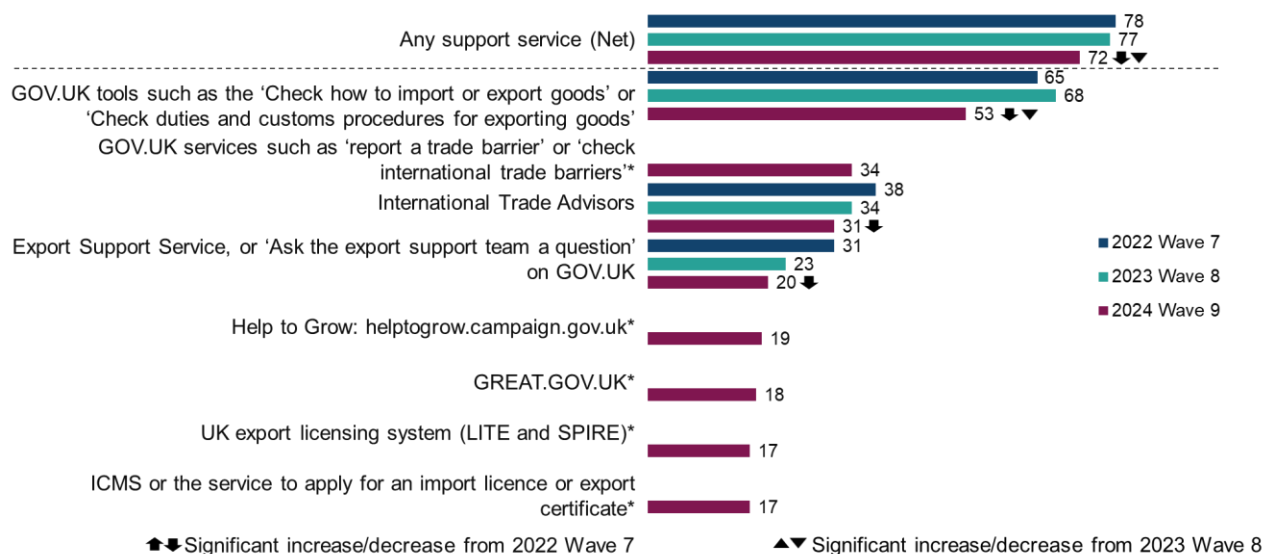
8.4 Awareness and usage of DBT export services

In the last quarter of 2021, a new question was introduced for all businesses (excluding those whose products would never be suitable for export), designed to assess which government support services they were aware of (Figure 8.7). In 2024, new codes were added for:

- GOV.UK services: 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers'
- Help to Grow campaign website
- GREAT.GOV.UK
- UK export licensing system (LITE or SPIRE)
- ICMS or service to apply for an import license or export certificate

In 2024, under three quarters of such businesses reported being aware of at least one support service (72%), a decrease from 77% in 2023. In line with last year, the most common of these were GOV.UK tools (53%), but this was also a decrease compared to 2023 (68%).³⁶ Around 1 in 3 mentioned GOV.UK services: 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers' (34%) and International Trade Advisors (31%, decrease from 34% in 2023). One in 5 mentioned the Export Support Service on GOV.UK (20%, a decrease from 23% in 2023). Around 1 in 5 were aware of the Help to Grow webpage (19%), GREAT.GOV.UK (18%), UK export licensing system (17%), and ICMS (17%). This suggests a need for DBT to continue to focus on increasing awareness of the support services available to businesses.

Figure 8.7: Awareness of UK government trade support services (% of businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export)



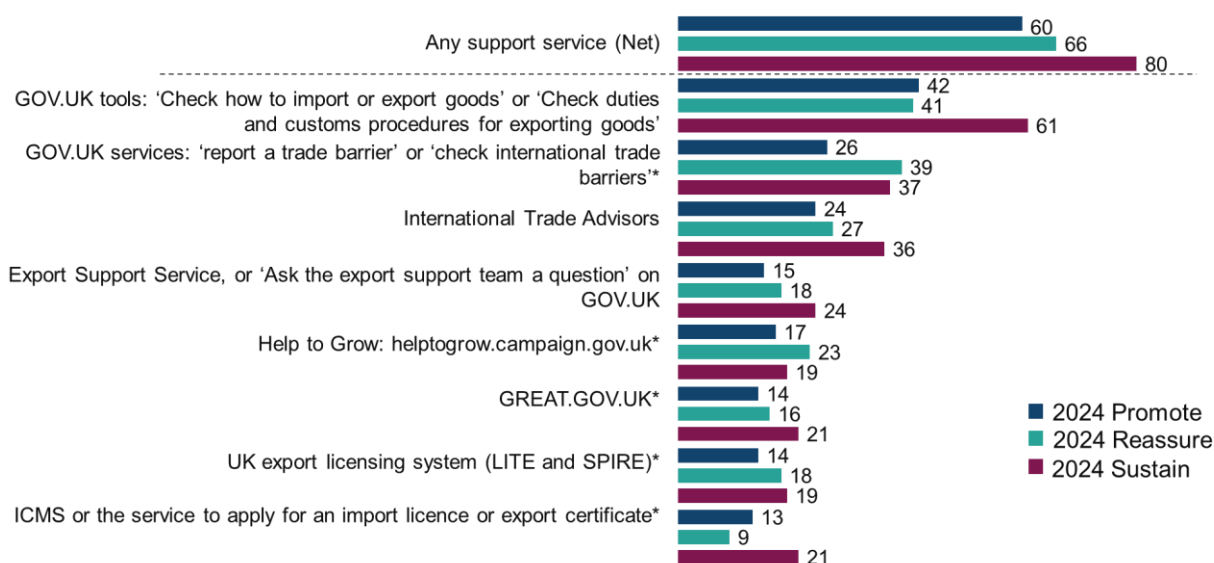
Source: Q34B. Which, if any, of the following UK government trade support services are you aware of?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export 2021 W6 Q4 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9 (369 / 1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270) * Sources added to wave 9 survey

³⁶ GOV.UK tools include 'Check how to import or export goods' and 'Check duties and customs procedures for exporting goods'.

Businesses who had exported in the past 12 months (80%, in the 'Sustain' segment) and those that had exported over 12 months ago ('Reassure', 66%) were more likely to be aware of any UK government trade support service than those who could but have never exported ('Promote' 60%). The 'Sustain' segment group was more likely to be aware of GOV.UK tools (61%), such as 'Check how to import or export goods' or 'Check duties and customs procedures for exporting goods' than the 'Promote' segment (42%) and 'Reassure' segment (41%).

Figure 8.8: Awareness of UK government trade support services by exporting segment (% of businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export)



Source: Q34B. Which, if any, of the following UK government trade support services are you aware of?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export 2024 W9: Promote (365), Reassure (130), Sustain (757) * Sources added to wave 9 survey

A new question added in 2022 asked all respondents (excluding those businesses whose products/services would never be suitable for export) whether they had used any government trade support service (see Figure 8.9). In 2024, just under half of those who had heard of any support service reported that they had used one (45%), consistent with 49% in 2023. GOV.UK tools were again the most cited service, selected by around a third (31%), a decrease from 45% in 2023. The second most used service was International Trade Advisors (11%), followed by the Export Support Service (8%). This suggests a need for DBT to promote the use of both the Export Support Service and International Trade Advisors to increase proportions of businesses using their services.

Businesses who have ever exported ('Sustain' or 'Reassure' segments) were more likely to have used any support service (57%) than those who had not exported ('Promote' or 'Challenge' segments; 19%). In particular, businesses who had exported were more likely to have used GOV.UK tools (41% compared with 11%) and GOV.UK services (such as 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers') (17% compared with 4%).

Figure 8.9: Use of UK government trade support services (% of businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export)



Source: Q34C. And which, if any, of these have you used?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses excluding those whose products/services would never be suitable for export 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9 (1,530 / 1,362 / 1,270)

8.5 Knowledge and skills gaps picked up throughout the survey

This section gathers and summarises businesses' knowledge and skills gaps that became apparent throughout the survey, to highlight groups for DBT to target.

One knowledge gap that surfaced in the survey findings is around Free Trade Agreements. Just under a quarter (20%) of businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export said they do not know anything about FTAs, and only 23% combined knew 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'. Businesses in the 'Sustain' (27%) or 'Reassure' (28%) segments were more likely to know something about FTAs than those in the 'Promote' (15%) segment. Similarly, only 35% of businesses who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export agreed that they are confident they would know how to trade through an FTA, with those in the 'Sustain' segment more likely to agree (40%) compared with 24% of those in the 'Promote' segment. This suggests a further need among businesses, especially those in the 'Promote' segment, to receive information on FTAs.

GOV.UK tools were more familiar, with just over half of business (53%) being aware of these in 2024. However, this represents a decrease from 2023 (69%) and suggests DBT should continue to target awareness of these tools.

9. Expectations for growth and trade – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

Positive attitudes and interest in exporting are the starting points for businesses embarking on their exporting journey. This chapter looks at business innovation and plans for growth, trends in attitudes related to exporting, and expectations for growth in UK exports.

Overall, the findings from this chapter indicate that the proportion of businesses aiming to grow has decreased, with businesses more focused on consolidating. There had been a general decline since 2018 in the proportion of businesses who felt that the value of UK exports would decrease, which has stabilised in 2024, indicating an overall incremental improvement in business confidence.

Key findings

- around 7 in 10 (68%) businesses were aiming to grow their business, down from 73% in 2023. At the other end of the scale, 20% stated that they were aiming for consolidation rather than growth (up from 14% in 2023) and 13% felt they needed to return to profitability
- attitudes towards exporting have been broadly stable over the past 5 years, although there has been a decrease in the proportion who feel there is a lot of support available to help small and medium businesses start exporting (30%, down from 35% in 2020)
- perceptions of there being a lot of demand for UK products and services around the world had been declining since 2020 (63% in 2020 to 52% in 2023). However, in 2024, this increased, with 62% agreeing with the statement
- the balance of opinion on expectations for growth in the value of UK exports over the next 12 months has mainly stayed consistent over the last year. There was no change from 2023 in the proportion who felt it would increase (24%) or decrease (22%). However, the proportion who felt it would decrease has been declining over time (from 30% in 2018 to 21% in 2023) and stabilised in 2024, indicating an overall incremental improvement in business confidence

9.1 Business thinking on growth

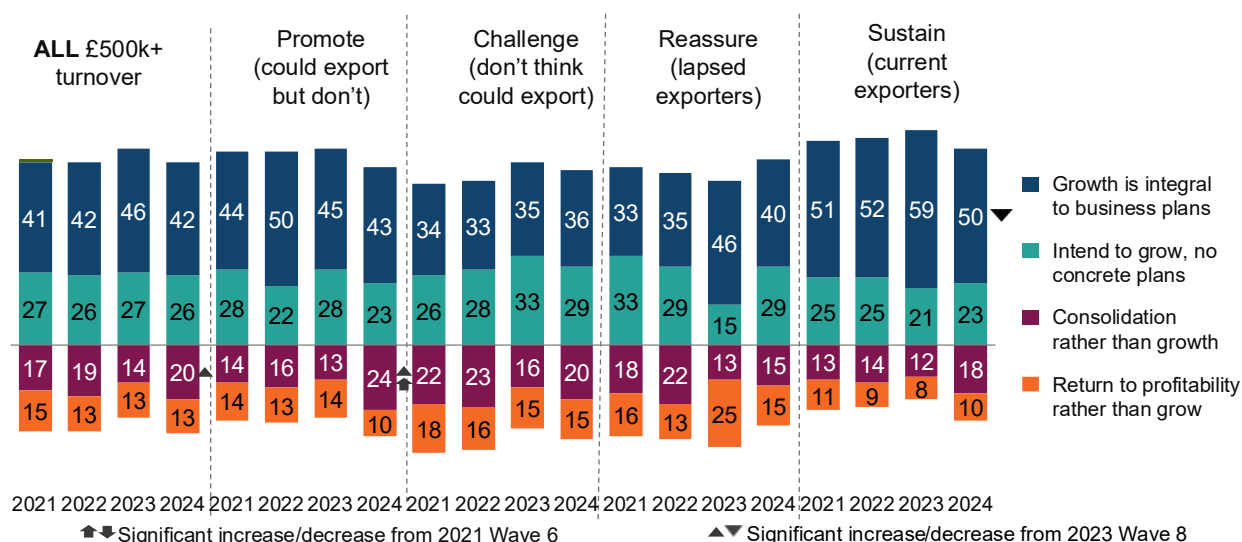
The question on growth was updated between 2020 and 2021 to reflect the potential impact of COVID-19 on business profitability. This reflected the fact that returning to profitability may be a key challenge for many businesses as they embarked on a road to recovery after COVID-19, but the question continues to be relevant given ongoing global events such as high energy prices, the cost-of-living crisis, and general economic uncertainty.

The introduction of an additional response option covering the return to profitability reduces the ability for direct year-on-year comparisons to be made with data collected prior to 2021, although the responses reflecting growth are broadly comparable with earlier years.

Overall, around 7 in 10 businesses (68%) reported that they were aiming to grow, a decrease from 73% in 2023. Growth was seen as integral to business plans for 42%, while 26% intended to grow but had no concrete plans to achieve this. At the other end of the scale, 20% stated that they were aiming for consolidation rather than growth (up from 14% in 2023) and 13% felt they needed to return to profitability (Figure 9.1).

Businesses in the ‘Sustain’³⁷ segment (current exporters) were the most likely to state that growth is an integral part of their business plans (50%), a decrease from 59% in 2023. ‘Challenge’³⁷ businesses (whose products or services were not suitable for export) were less likely than current exporters (Sustain) to report that growth is an integral part of their business plan (36%). Furthermore, the proportion of ‘Challenge’ businesses aiming to consolidate rather than grow their business increased from 16% in 2023 to 20% in 2024.

Figure 9.1: Current thinking on growth (% of all respondents)



Source: Q11 (GROWATT). Which of these best describes your thinking on growth?

Base: All £500k+ turnover businesses 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: (2,485 / 2,405 / 1,087 / 1,085), Promote (351 / 341 / 200 / 174), Challenge (843 / 875 / 391 / 451), Reassure (217 / 196 / 78* / 73*), Sustain (1,052 / 974 / 408 / 378) [Half sample selected at random in 2023 W8 and 2024 W9] * Base size is below 100; treat with caution

As in previous years, intentions to grow were much stronger among larger businesses: 85% of large businesses (250+ employees) and 64% of medium businesses (50 to 249 employees) said growth was an integral part of their business plans, compared with 34% of micro businesses (0 to 9 employees). Micro businesses were more likely than other businesses to be aiming for consolidation (26% compared with 11%).

Businesses in the West Midlands were most likely to state that growth was an integral part of their business plans (52%), higher than businesses in the North (33%) and East Midlands (33%). Those in the North East (23%) and Northern Ireland (22%) were more likely than businesses in other regions to be aiming for a return to profitability rather than growth.

9.2 Attitudes to exporting, and demand for UK products

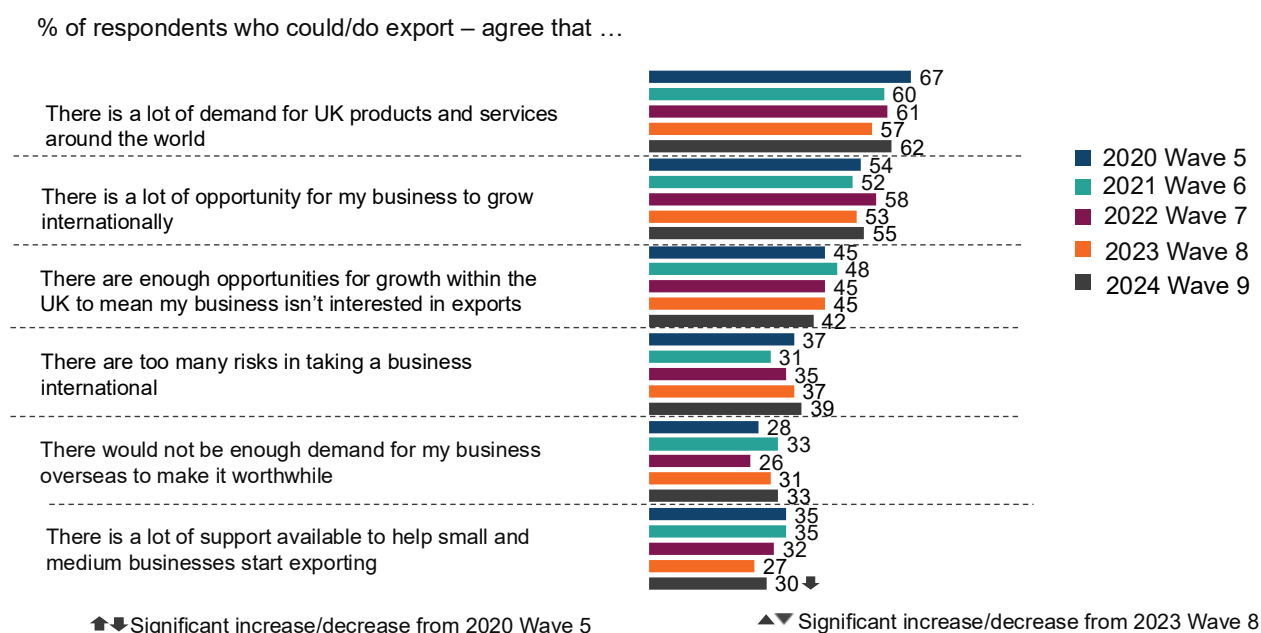
Businesses with either experience of or potential for exporting were asked a series of questions about their attitudes towards exporting. The proportion who agreed with each statement (either strongly or slightly) is shown in Figure 9.2. Overall, the picture is broadly similar to the previous 4 years, although over this time there has been a decrease in the proportion who feel there is a lot of

³⁷ See section 3.5 ‘Segment Definitions’ for a full explanation.

support available to help small and medium businesses start exporting (30% in 2024, down from 35% in 2020).

Agreement that there is a lot of demand for UK products and services around the world had been declining from 2020 (67%) to 2023 (57%). In 2024, this stabilised, with 62% agreeing with the statement.

Figure 9.2: Attitudes to exporting (% of respondents who could/do export)



Source: Q31(EXP_STAT). To what extent do you agree or disagree that...

Base: All who export or could potentially export: £500k+ turnover 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7 / 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9 (1,564 / 1,642 / 1,530 / 706 / 635) [Half sample selected at random in 2023 W8 and 2024 W9]

Current exporters, in the 'Sustain' segment, were more likely than lapsed or potential exporters, (in the 'Reassure' or 'Promote' segments) to agree that there is a lot of opportunity for their business to grow internationally (69%, compared with 37% and 34% respectively). Conversely, businesses in the 'Reassure' and 'Promote' segments, which by definition have less of a focus on exporting, were more likely than 'Sustain' businesses to agree that:

- there are enough opportunities for growth in the UK (51% 'Reassure' and 65% 'Promote' compared with 30% 'Sustain')
- there would not be enough demand for their business overseas to make it worthwhile (54% 'Reassure' and 42% 'Promote' compared with 25% 'Sustain')
- there are too many risks in taking a business international (51% 'Promote' compared with 32% 'Sustain')

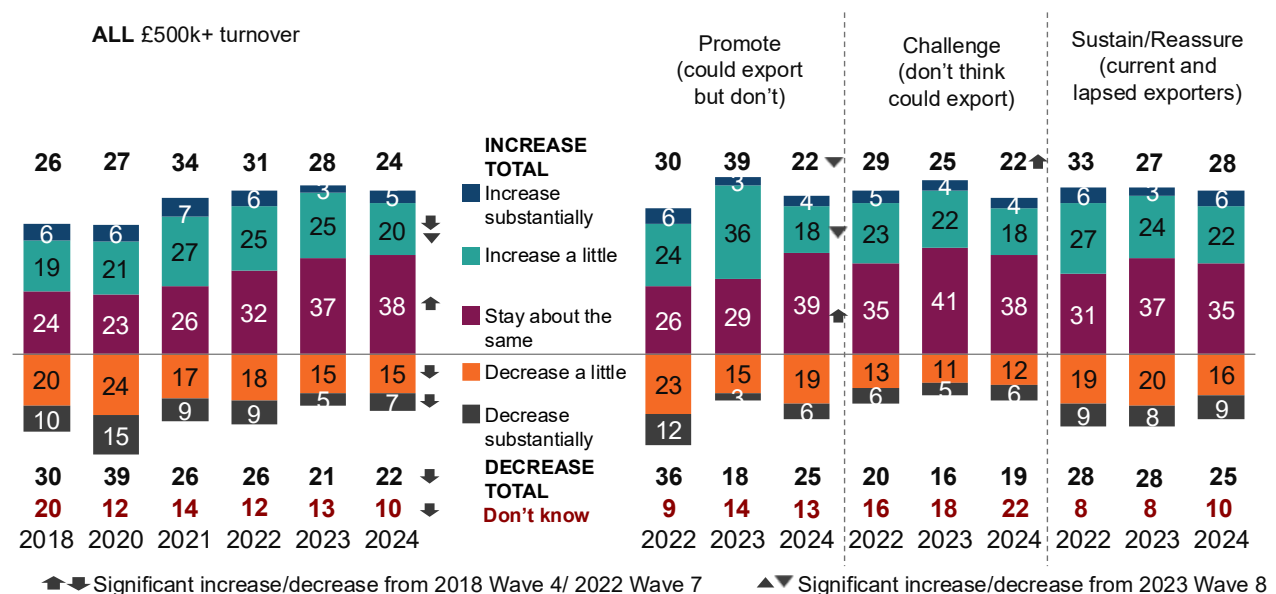
Just under 1 in 3 (28%) lapsed exporters (in the 'Reassure' segment) and 2 in 10 (19%) of potential exporters (Promote) agreed that there is a lot of support available to help small and medium businesses start exporting. By comparison, 35% of current exporters agreed with this statement in 2024, though this has also seen a decrease over time (43% in 2015). More visible and/or additional targeted communications around help and support services may be required to improve this measure.

9.3 Expectations for growth over the next 12 months

To get a sense of business confidence in the prospects for UK exports, businesses were asked whether they believed the value of UK exports would increase, decrease or stay the same over the next 12 months.

Around 1 in 4 (24%) believed the value of UK exports would increase, unchanged from 28% in 2023, though there was a decline in those who thought it would 'increase a little' (20% in 2024, down from 25% in 2023; see figure 9.3). Just over 1 in 5 (22%) believed it would decrease, also consistent with 2023. The proportion who felt it would decrease has been declining over time (from 30% in 2018 to 21% in 2023) and stabilised in 2024, indicating an overall incremental improvement in business confidence.

Figure 9.3: Whether businesses believe value of UK exports will increase or decrease over the next 12 months (% of all respondents)



Source: Q40b. And over the next 12 months or so, do you think that the total value of exports by UK businesses will...

Base: All respondents 2018 W4 / 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7* / 2023 W8* / 2024 W9*: £500k+ turnover (2,448 / 2,557 / 2,485 / 1,199 / 1,094 / 1,097); 2022 W7* / 2023 W8* / 2024 W9*: Promote (166 / 180 / 191), Challenge (451 / 428 / 461), Sustain/Reassure (574 / 471 / 436)

* Half sample selected at random in W7, W8 and W9

Businesses in the 'Sustain/ Reassure' sectors (current and lapsed exporters) were more likely than those in other segments to feel that the value of UK exports would increase over the next 12 months (28%). Just over 1 in 5 (22%) of businesses in the 'Promote' sector (those who hadn't exported but whose product or service could be suitable), felt that the value of UK exports would increase, a decrease from 39% in 2023. Similarly, there was an increase, though not significantly so, in the proportion of 'Promote' businesses who felt the value of UK exports would decrease over the next 12 months from 18% in 2023 to 25% in 2024. This highlights a change in opinion in this segment from more positive to negative. Current and lapsed exporters (25%) were more likely than those in the 'Challenge' (19%) segment to feel that the value of UK exports would decrease over the next 12 months.

By region, those in London were most likely to feel that the value of UK exports would increase in the next 12 months (29%). By sector, this view was most likely to be held by those in transportation and storage (33%) and professional services (26%).

10. Importing – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

This chapter covers businesses' importing activity and eligibility for FTA benefits. These questions on importing were added in 2023.

Key findings

- just under half of businesses had imported (47%). 39% of businesses had imported in the last 12 months and 8% had not imported in the last 12 months but had done so previously
- businesses in the 'Sustain' segment were most likely to have imported in the last 12 months and businesses in the 'Reassure' segment were most likely to have imported, but not in the last 12 months, suggesting that exporting and importing behaviour is closely related
- just under half (47%) said they were eligible for any benefit when importing goods or services. Reduced customs duties were cited by just over 1 in 4 businesses (27%), followed by mutual recognition of product regulation or testing requirements (26%) and ability to easily transfer data between countries (22%)

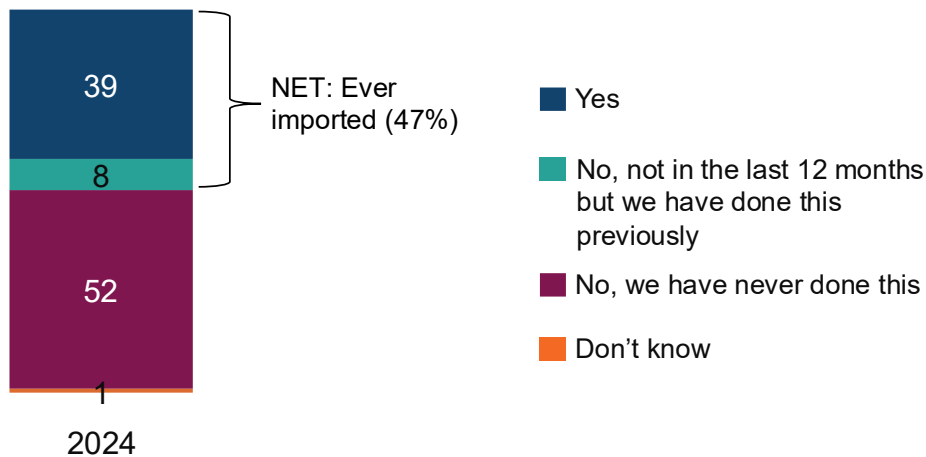
10.1 Importing activity

All businesses were asked about whether they had imported over the past 12 months (Figure 10.1). Just under half of businesses (47%) had imported, with 39% having done so in the last 12 months and 8% having done so previously. This was in line with findings from 2023.

Businesses in the 'Sustain' segment were most likely to have imported in the last 12 months (69%) compared with all other segments (48% 'Reassure', 37% 'Promote', 18% 'Challenge'). 'Reassure' businesses were most likely to have imported more than 12 months ago (17%) compared with all other segments (8% 'Sustain', 9% 'Promote', 6% 'Challenge').

Businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (54%) and manufacturing, raw materials, and energy sector (5%) were most likely to have imported in the last 12 months. The financial and insurance (17%) and education and health (13%) sectors were least likely to have imported in the last year.

Figure 10.1: Importing activity (% of all respondents)



▲▼ Significant increase/decrease from 2023 Wave 8

Source: QIMP1. In the last 12 months has your business imported goods and services from outside the UK?

Base: All £500,000+ businesses: wave 9: 2,182

10.2 Eligibility for FTA benefits

Businesses who said they had imported before were asked about the eligibility of their goods or services for benefits arising from FTAs. Just under half (47%) said they were eligible for any benefit when importing goods or services, down from 54% in 2023. Reduced customs duties were cited by just over 1 in 4 businesses (27%), a decrease from 33% in 2023. This was followed by mutual recognition of product regulation or testing requirements (26%) and ability to easily transfer data between countries (22%). Findings for this question are explored in more detail in Chapter 6.2.

11. Advertising and campaign metrics – (£500,000+ turnover businesses)

As part of the NSRB, businesses are asked a series of questions about DBT's campaign activity, including awareness and recall of campaigns, as well as diagnostic measures to capture businesses' views on campaign relevance, clarity, support and information, and action that businesses have taken or plan to take as a result of seeing these campaigns. The campaign materials have changed over time, however. Since wave 7 (2022), questions have focussed on recognition of and diagnostics relating to the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' (MIUK) campaign, and the UK Export Academy campaign. It is useful to understand these campaign measures in line with the context below.

- wave 1 was conducted prior to the launch of the Exporting is GREAT campaign. Subsequent waves have been conducted around bursts of campaign activity
- due to the variability of campaign activity, the relative timings of fieldwork have varied between waves
- wave 2 was conducted immediately after the campaign had aired
- wave 3 was conducted 3 months after the campaign had aired, which may have affected the recorded levels of campaign awareness
- wave 4 was conducted during campaign activity, so there was no time lag. However, the amount of activity which took place prior to fieldwork was lower than for previous waves, which may also have impacted on campaign awareness
- 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign activity paused while the first quarter of wave 5 was in field and has not resumed since
- from wave 2 through to wave 5 quarter 1, respondents were directed to a website which allowed them to view campaign materials during the telephone interview
- in the time period covered by last half of wave 5 and beginning of wave 6, DBT's campaign activity was minimal to allow for the EU transition campaign in preparation for the UK's exit from the EU. In wave 6 quarter 4 new campaign activity was launched to direct businesses to export support services and export advice/webinars
- for wave 7 and 8, respondents were again directed to a website which allowed them to view campaign materials during the telephone interview.
- 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' (MIUK) launched in November 2021, prior to the start of wave 7 fieldwork and since then has been the singular export promotion campaign for the department. Marketing ran across paid media channels until March 2022 and then resumed in October 2022, continuing beyond the close of wave 7 fieldwork. Other services-based promotions such as those for the Export Support Service (ESS) and UK Export Academy (UKEA) are included under the umbrella of the MIUK campaign
- campaign materials were refreshed ahead of wave 8 and again ahead of wave 9, and businesses were shown the most up-to-date images from the MIUK and UKEA campaigns during fieldwork. Images for the great.gov help and support pages were also introduced in wave 9

The multi-channel export promotion marketing campaign ran until March 31st 2025. At that point activity was paused and is expected to resume as a wider SME support campaign in November 2025. Some low cost / no cost activity has still been running, including some export promotion work under Made in the UK, Sold to the World, as well as wider SME support and the launch of the Business Growth Service. While these changes didn't affect the time period reported on in this report, this context is useful for understanding the current status of the campaign with regards to these results.

Questions about the recognition of 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World', UK Export Academy and great.gov help and support pages are asked about in the NSRB. Diagnostic questions are also asked about 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World'. This campaign was developed during the period after the UK exited the European Union. As part of exiting the EU, the UK entered a year-long transition period on 31 January 2020, which allowed for the negotiation of a trade agreement between the UK and EU (and for businesses to prepare for any new rules arising from that trade agreement). As such, there was considerable government campaign activity from July 2020 and into early 2021 aimed at making businesses aware of when the transition period was ending and the need to prepare for the new rules. Over this period, DBT was only running relatively light-touch campaigns relating to exporting, or none at all. This was to allow for the EU transition messaging to be communicated to businesses while minimising 'noise' from any other campaigns focusing on different aspects of international trade.

In the final quarter of 2021, new campaign materials designed to direct businesses to export support services were launched and were refreshed in 2022. The 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign was also launched during International Trade Week 2021. Although the launch of the new campaign would have played a role in boosting awareness of advertising and publicity on the topic of exporting at the end of 2021, spend on the campaign was relatively low at this time and so the increases in awareness recorded in 2021 was likely to be attributable largely to the EU transition campaign. In 2022, the impact of DBT's 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign was more clearly measurable, although there was still evidence that recall of publicity from the EU transition period remains (in 2022, 4% of those who were spontaneously aware of advertising or publicity cited references to 'Brexit or preparing for Brexit' in the advertising they had seen). However, in 2023, references to Brexit or preparing for Brexit decreased to 1%, indicating a reduction in recall of the EU transition campaign.

The aim of the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign is to shift attitudes in favour of exporting by making it feel possible and desirable for businesses. The aim is that this will encourage businesses to pursue international opportunities and increase the number of first-time exporters and businesses exporting into new markets. The campaign showcases real stories from successful exporters in a variety of sectors across the UK and demonstrates the range of opportunities that are available.

Alongside the core 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign, adverts for the UK Export Academy campaign and great.gov help and support pages continued to signpost businesses towards specific export support.

Key findings

- high profile information and publicity around the EU Exit transition period contributed to raising levels of awareness of communications activity around exporting in 2021. As of 2022 awareness decreased to more typical levels, and were unchanged in 2024 (23%), though remained higher than in 2015 (18%)
- government remains the main source to which businesses attribute publicity around exporting. In 2024, general mentions of the UK government were unchanged (57%,

compared to 63% in 2023). Specific mentions of the Department for Business and Trade were also unchanged (14%, compared to 12% in 2023)

- the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign was recognised by 11% of businesses, while 4% recognised adverts for the UK Export Academy campaign and 3% the great.gov help and support campaigns. The MIUK campaign was more likely to be recognised by exporters (Sustain or Reassure) and potential exporters (Promote) (12%) than those who said their products or services are not suitable for export (Challenge, 7%). Otherwise, across all campaigns, there were no differences in recognition by exporting segment
- overall, the 2024 DBT MIUK campaign was seen as clear (78%, an increase from 71% in 2023) and a trusted source of information (69%). Just under half (47%) felt that the ads stood out, a higher proportion than for the 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign in 2018 (37%). Around one in 4 (27%) felt the 2024 campaign was relevant to them, an increase from 2023 (20%) and from the 2018 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign (29%)
- the campaign was seen to contain new information by less than 2 out of 5 (37%) businesses, down from 51% in 2023. Potential exporters (in the 'Promote' segment) were more likely to report that the campaign contained new information (43%) compared with current exporters ('Sustain' segment, 26%). Agreement that the ads made clear where to go for exporting information also decreased from 63% in 2023 to 57% in 2024
- in total, 21% of those who viewed the ads had either taken some action as a result of seeing the ads previously, planned to take action, or would consider doing so in future. The main actions either taken, planned or considered were visiting the great.gov.uk website, DBT's great.gov guidance and support pages, or research other aspects of an overseas market (e.g. demand, competitors etc)
- over one in 10 (14%) of those recognising the ads had already taken action at the time of interview, while 13% stated that there were actions (including additional actions) they planned to take or would consider taking in the future. This suggests that the campaigns are reasonably successful at prompting businesses to act if they are aware of them. However, overall awareness remains relatively low. DBT should aim to increase overall awareness and recognition of campaigns and ensure clear signposting and calls to action to encourage more businesses to explore exporting

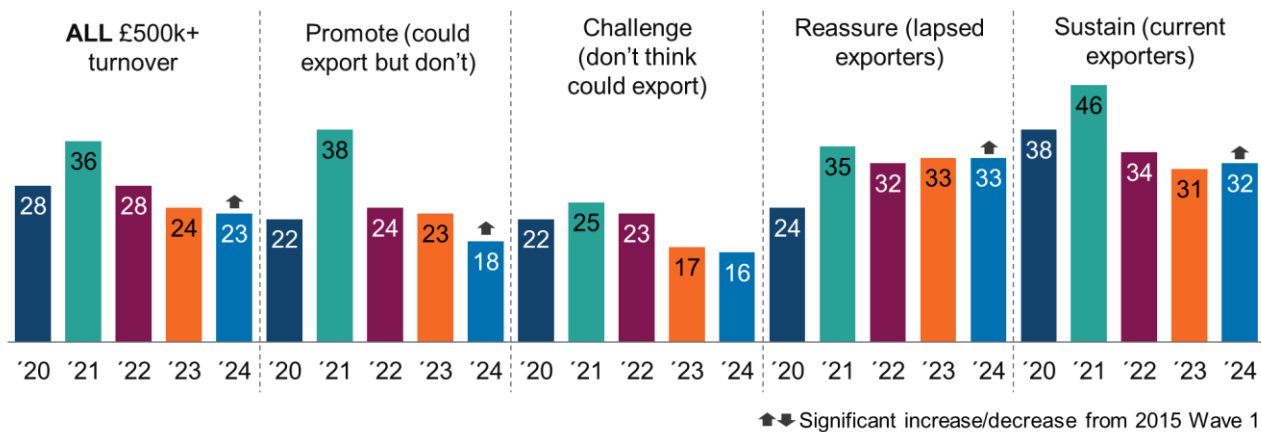
11.1 Awareness of advertising and information about exporting

Spontaneous awareness of 'any advertising, publicity or other types of information encouraging businesses to think about exporting' was first asked to all businesses in 2015. This created a baseline against which the potential impact of subsequent campaign activities could be measured. Spontaneous awareness increased in the year following the baseline (from 18% in 2015 to 30% in 2016), reflecting the launch of DBT's 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign. It then remained broadly consistent up until 2020, supported by ongoing bursts of campaign activity. Following an uplift in awareness in 2021, awareness reduced to more usual levels in 2022 (28%), then decreased further in 2023 (24%) and remained stable in 2024 (23%).

There has been variation over the years in spontaneous awareness of advertising and publicity about exporting between segments, although awareness has typically been higher in the exporting segments ('Sustain' and 'Reassure') than for those who had never exported ('Promote' and 'Challenge'). In 2024, awareness stood at 32% in the 'Sustain' segment and 33% in the 'Reassure' segment, both consistent with 2023. Awareness of advertising and publicity about exporting decreased, but not significantly so, in the 'Promote' segment to 18% in 2024. Within the 'Challenge' segment (those whose product or service is not suitable for export) awareness of publicity about exporting has previously remained at around 1 in 4 in the years since the 2015

baseline. In 2023, this decreased from 23% in 2022 to 16% in 2024, with this group driving the overall reduction in awareness.

Figure 11.1: Spontaneous awareness of exporting publicity (% of all respondents spontaneously aware of exporting publicity)



Source: Q39. In the last year, have you seen or heard any advertising, publicity or other types of information encouraging businesses to think about exporting?

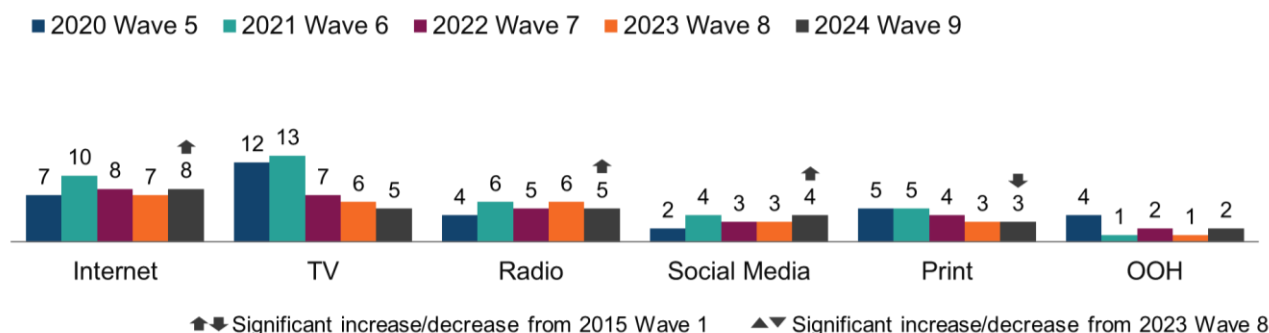
Base: All respondents 2020 W5 / 2021 W6[^] / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: All £500,000+ turnover (2,557 / 1,243 / 2,405 / 2,181 / 2,182), Promote (368 / 165 / 341 / 380 / 365), Challenge (993 / 429 / 875 / 819 / 912), Reassure (148 / 100 / 196 / 152 / 130), Sustain (1,025 / 536 / 974 / 805 / 757)

[^] Random half sample at 2021 W6.

In 2024, spontaneous awareness of advertising or publicity about exporting by business size remained in line with 2023 levels. By sector, businesses in transportation and storage were most likely to be aware of advertising (46%), whereas those in construction and real estate and consumer discretionary sectors were least likely to be aware of advertising (14%). By region, awareness was highest in Northern Ireland (34%), and this was higher than the national (GB) average (22%). Awareness was lowest in the East Midlands at 15%.

Businesses were also asked to specify where they had seen or heard information or advertising about exporting. As in 2023, the internet (8%) was the most mentioned source, remaining higher than mentions of TV (5%, Figure 11.2). This reflects the different media focus of the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign, which has not run on TV. This contrasts with the previous 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign and EU Exit campaigns, for which TV played an important role.

Figure 11.2: Source of awareness of information and advertising about exporting (% of all respondents spontaneously aware of exporting publicity on ...)



Source: Q40. Where did you see or hear this information or advertising?

Base: All respondents 2020 W5 / 2021 W6[^] / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: All £500,000+ turnover (2,557 / 1,243 / 2,405 / 2,181 / 2,182) [^]Random half sample at 2021 W6

Businesses with experience of exporting (in the 'Sustain' and 'Reassure' segments) were more likely than non-exporters (in the 'Promote' and 'Challenge' segments) to be aware of publicity about exporting from the internet (13% compared with 5%), print (4% compared with 2%) and social media (6% compared with 2%).

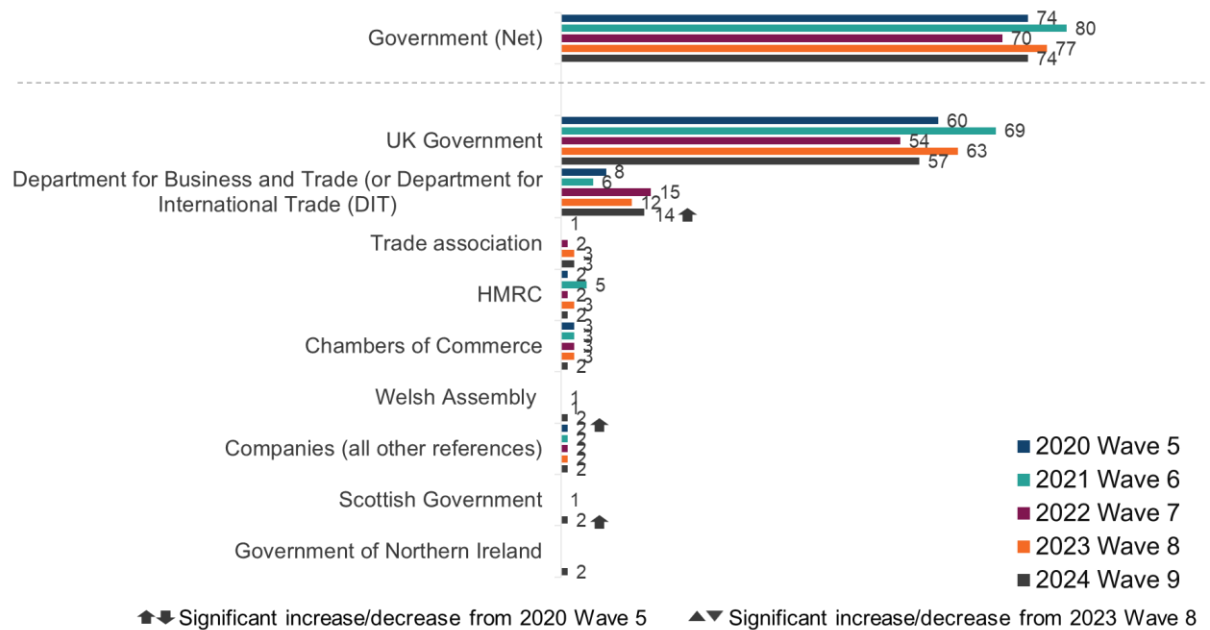
Businesses that were aware of advertising or publicity were asked who they believed was responsible for what they saw. As in previous years, the government (net measure of all government bodies, campaigns and general reference to UK government) was the main source to which businesses attributed advertising (74%). Within this measure, there was no significant change in general attributions to the UK government (57%, compared to 63% in 2023). Attributions to the Department for Business and Trade (or DIT or DTI)³⁸ was also unchanged in 2024 (14%, compared to 12% in 2023), though this was an increase from 2020 (8%), as shown in Figure 11.3.

Businesses in the 'Promote' segment (potential exporters) were more likely to attribute advertising to the UK government (72%) than non-exporters in the 'Challenge' segment (50%) and those with experience of exporting (57%, 'Sustain' or 'Reassure' segments). However, those potential exporters were less likely to attribute advertising to the DBT (5%) compared to those in the 'Challenge' (17%) or 'Sustain' and 'Reassure' (15%) segments.

Micro businesses were also more likely to attribute advertising to the UK Government (64%) compared to all other business sizes (SME at 58% and Large at 31%).

³⁸ In 2022, mentions of Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) were combined with those for Department for International Trade (DIT) for the first time. DTI is a predecessor department to DIT and has not existed under that name since 2007. However, combining these mentions together is unlikely to have caused the large increase in attribution to DIT in 2022 as mentions of DTI had fallen to 2% in 2021. In 2023, this was changed to the Department for Business and Trade (or DIT or DTI).

Figure 11.3: Who businesses thought was responsible for information or advertising they saw (% of respondents who are aware of advertising/publicity)



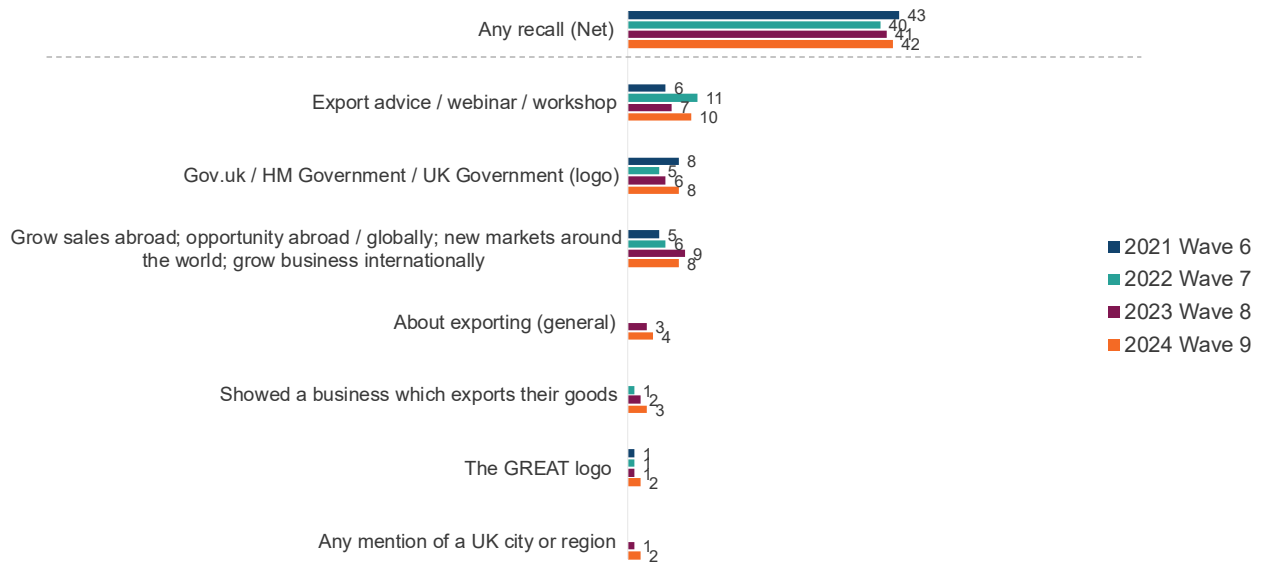
Source: AD4. Who do you think was responsible for the information or advertising you remember seeing?

Base: All aware of advertising or publicity: £500,000+ turnover 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / W8 2023 / 2024 W9 (791 / 453 / 676 / 537 / 523)

Only showing responses given by at least 2% in 2024

In 2021, a new question was added to the survey to start tracking what businesses spontaneously recalled from the advertisements or information they had seen about exporting. In 2024, 2 in 5 (42%) businesses were able to recall something specific about the advert or publicity they had seen, in line with 2023 (Figure 11.4). Overall likelihood of recalling specifics about advertisements remained consistent from 2023 to 2024, with no changes from 2021 or 2023. However, mentions of exports advice, webinars and workshops were the most mentioned element of advertising remembered, compared with 'Grow sales abroad' in 2023.

Figure 11.4: Elements recalled of information or advertising about exporting (% of respondents who are aware of advertising/publicity)



Source: Q40_AD_SOURCE_B. Can you briefly describe any elements of the advertisements you have seen?

Base: All aware of advertising or publicity: £500,000+ turnover 2021 W6 Q2-Q4 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9 (318 / 676 / 537 / 524) *Q4 only in W6
Only showing responses given by at least 2% in 2024

11.2 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign recognition

During the interview, all respondents were asked to navigate to a website to view the campaign materials – 49% of respondents agreed and were able to do this.³⁹ From the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign, respondents were shown a montage of ads from the campaign (Figure 11.5). After viewing, they were asked if it was something they had seen, or similar to something they had seen before.

³⁹ There could be several reasons why a respondent was unable to access the website, including refusal, lack of computer access, internet issues etc.

Figure 11.5: 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' ads shown in interview⁴⁰



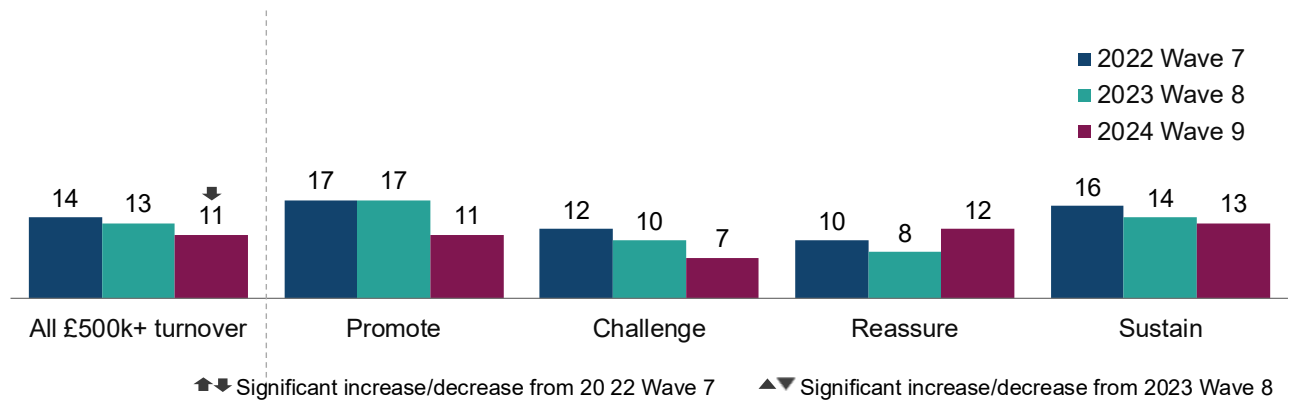
Overall, the campaign was recognised by 1 in 10 (11%) of those who were able to view the materials on the survey website, continuing a decline from 2022 (14%) and 2023 (13%) (Figure 11.6). By way of comparison, in 2018⁴¹ the 'Exporting is GREAT' ads were recognised by 21% of those who viewed them.

Recognition of 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' ads was higher for exporters and potential exporters (12% of those in 'Sustain', 'Reassure' and 'Promote' segments) than non-exporters in the 'Challenge' segment (7%). There were no differences in recognition of the ads between regions and business size.

⁴⁰ These images, shown to survey respondents, were the latest available campaign materials during fieldwork.

⁴¹ 2018 has been chosen as a comparison point as, although the campaign had been established for a number of years, 2018 was the first time it did not contain a TV/video element. However, it is possible that there would still have been some residual awareness and/or misattribution from the TV campaign.

Figure 11.6: Campaign recognition – ‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ (% of all respondents recognising ‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ advertisements)



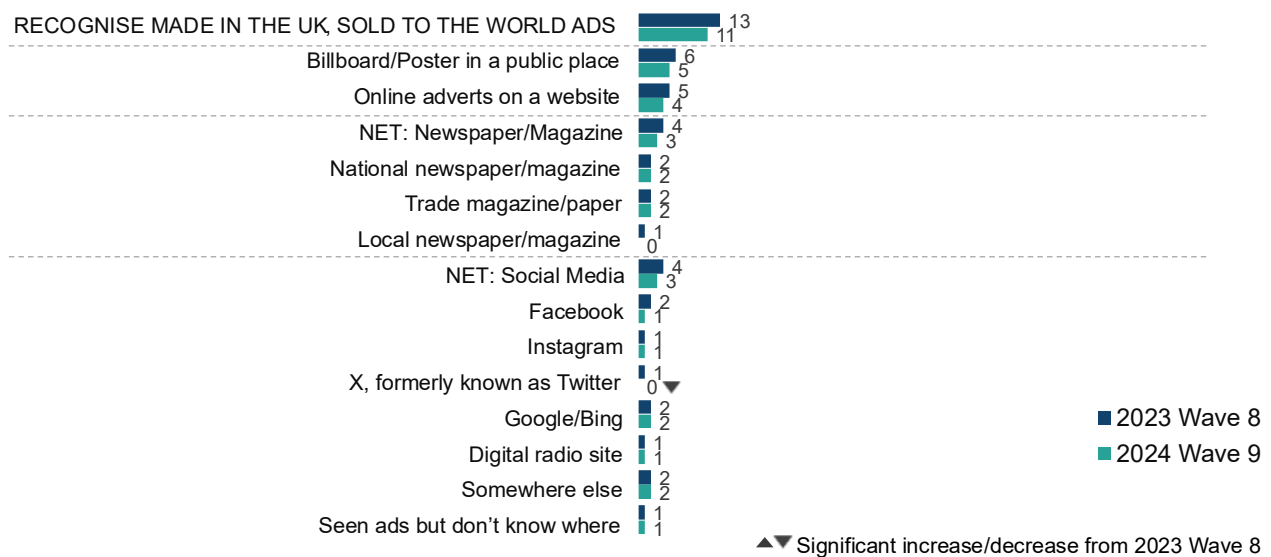
Source: AD7. This screen shows images from a range of adverts. Please scroll down and when you have seen all of the images, I'd like you to tell me whether you have seen any of these adverts, or adverts very similar to them, since October 2022.

Base: All respondents who could access the website during the interview and could view at least one image: 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: All £500,000+ turnover (1,373 / 1,292 / 1,037); Promote (199 / 214 / 195); Challenge (445 / 454 / 392); Reassure (113 / 95 / 63*); Sustain (604/520/381)

* Base size is below 100; treat with caution

Those who recognised the ‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ ads were asked where they had seen them. Around 1 in 20 of those able to view the ads during the interview had previously seen them on a billboard or poster (5%), on a website (4%), on social media (3%) or in a newspaper or magazine (3%) (Figure 11.7). Among those who said they had seen any of the ads or adverts similar to them before, around half (47%) had seen them on a billboard or poster, 38% on a website, 30% in a newspaper or magazine and 28% on social media.

Figure 11.7: Recognition and source of recognition of ‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ ads (% of all respondents recognising ‘Made in the UK, Sold to the World’ ads and where seen)



Source: AD7. This screen shows images from a range of adverts. Please scroll down and when you have seen all of the images, I'd like you to tell me whether you have seen any of these adverts, or adverts very similar to them, since October 2022. AD8. And where did you see those adverts? Were they on or in...

Base: All respondents who could access the website during the interview and could view images of MIUK ads: 2023 wave 8 / 2024 wave 9: All £500,000+ turnover (1,292 / 1,037)

11.3 UK Export Academy campaign and great.gov help and support pages recognition

Figure 11.8 shows the images from the UK Export Academy campaign (UKEA) and the great.gov help and support campaign that respondents were asked to view on the website during the interview.

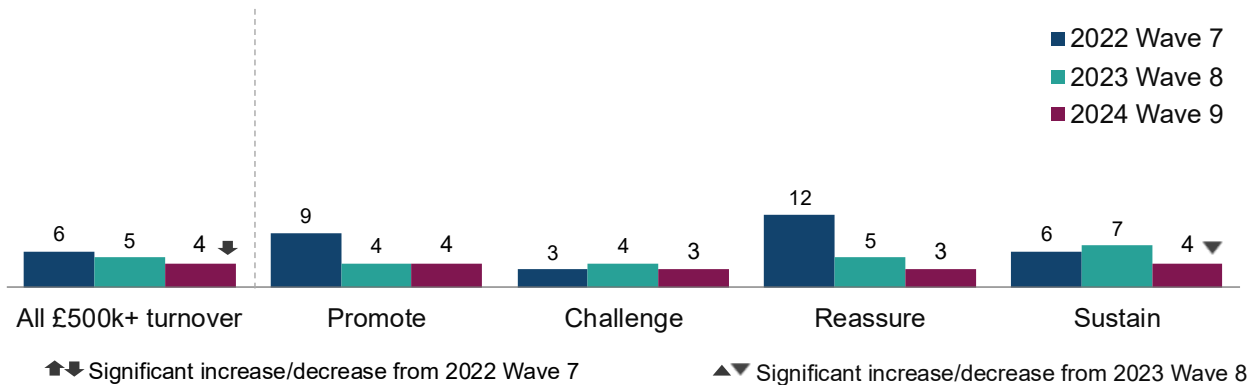
Figure 11.8: UKEA and great.gov help and support campaign ads shown in interview⁴²



Around 1 in 20 (4%) of the respondents who could access the website and view the images recognised the UKEA ads (purple image and text, Figure 11.8), a decrease compared to 2022 (6%; Figure 11.9). There were no differences in recognition by segments, though among businesses who currently export ('Sustain', 4%), there was a decrease in campaign recognition from 2023 (7%).

In 2024, ads relating to the great.gov help and support pages were introduced (blue images and text, Figure 11.8). Less than 1 in 20 (3%) recognised the great.gov help and support ads, similar to the UKEA campaign.

Figure 11.9: Campaign recognition - UK Export Academy (% of all respondents recognising UK Export Academy)



⁴² These images, shown to survey respondents, were the latest available campaign materials during fieldwork. They are no longer the current campaign materials at the time of writing this report.

Source: AD6B. Before today had you seen any of these adverts on this screen before?

Base: All respondents who could access the website during the interview and could view UKEA images: 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: All £500,000+ turnover (1,376 / 1,281 / 1,020); Promote (201 / 212 / 192); Challenge (446 / 450 / 385); Reassure (113 / 95* / 62*); Sustain (604 / 515 / 375)

* Base size is below 100; treat with caution

11.4 DBT campaign effectiveness

After viewing the DBT materials from the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign, those able to view the ads⁴³ were asked a series of questions designed to assess the effectiveness of the advertising activity. These questions were asked after viewing the MIUK materials only, so respondents were only considering the MIUK campaign⁴⁴.

Around a quarter (23%) of those able to view the campaign materials said that they had increased their interest in finding out more about exporting. This is in line with the 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign in 2018 (27%). Among all of those who viewed the campaign materials, those in the 'Sustain' (26%) segment were more likely than those in the 'Challenge' (18%) segment to state that the 2024 DBT materials increased their interest in finding out more about exporting. There were no differences by sector or business size.

Further questions went on to evaluate the campaigns in terms of their ability to stand out, the way in which the information was conveyed (whether it was clear, relevant, new or trustworthy), communication of messages specific to the campaigns, and whether they prompted respondents to consider exploring exporting options (Figure 11.10).

- just under half (47%) agreed that the advertising stood out from other advertising, making it more impactful than the 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign in 2018 (37%). However, this is a decrease from 2022, where 55% of business felt the advertising stood out.
- information conveyed in the adverts was seen to be clear and easy to understand (78%), a decrease from 84% in 2022, but an increase from 71% in 2023.
- over two-thirds (69%) of businesses agreed they trust the information given. This was unchanged since 2023 (66%) following a decrease from 76% in 2022, and in line with as for the 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign in 2018 (66%).
- just over a third (37%) agreed that the adverts told them something new, continuing a decline from 2022 (62%) and 2023 (51%).
- over a quarter (27%) respondents felt the 2024 campaigns were relevant to them, lower than for the 2018 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign (29%), but an increase compared to 2023 (20%). In 2024, agreement that the campaigns were relevant varied by segment – it was highest for 'Sustain' (exported in the past 12 months, 39%) followed by 'Reassure' (exported more than 12 months ago, 30%) and 'Promote' (haven't exported but has a suitable product, 28%), with agreement among the 'Challenge' segment (without an exportable product) much lower (14%).

While there was little difference between the segments in terms of how clear or trustworthy they found the ads to be, those who had not previously exported (the 'Promote' and 'Challenge' segments) were more likely to feel the ads told them something new (44%) than current or former exporters in the 'Sustain' and 'Reassure' (28%) segments.

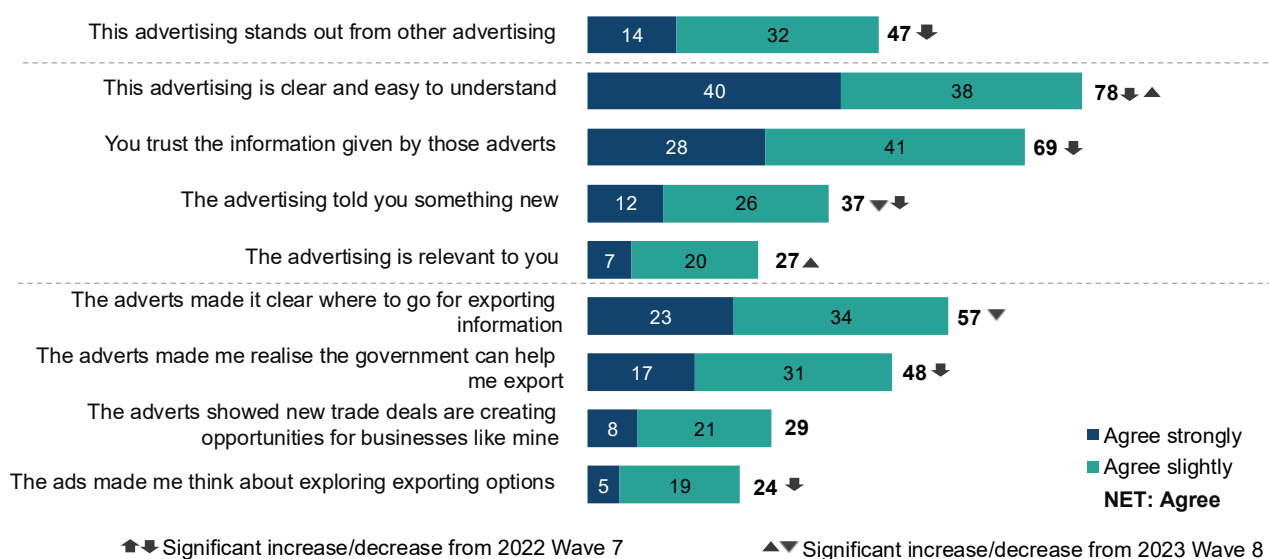
⁴³ The vast majority of those able to access the website and view at least one screen of campaign materials were able to view all of them.

⁴⁴ In Q2-Q4 of W8 and all quarters of wave 9, these questions were asked after viewing only the MIUK campaign.

In relation to specific campaign messages, around 2 in 5 (37%) agreed that the ads made clear where to go for exporting information, a decrease from 51% in 2023. Around half agreed the ads made them realise the government can help them export (48%) and less than a third (29%) agreed the ads showed that new trade deals were creating opportunities for businesses like theirs.

The ads prompted one quarter (24%) of respondents to think about exploring exporting options, an overall decrease from 29% in 2022. In 2024, agreement was highest among those in the 'Reassure' (36%) and 'Sustain' (29%) segments.

Figure 11.10: Response to DBT campaigns (% of respondents who could view the ads)



Source: AD12. Thinking about these adverts, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Base: All respondents who could access the website during the interview and could view at least one image*: £500,000+ turnover 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9 (1,379 / 1,295 / 1,037).

*In W8 Q2 – Q4 and W9 (all quarters) asked after viewing only MIUK adverts

11.5 Overall impact of campaign materials

Those who had seen the campaign materials prior to interview were additionally asked if they had done anything, planned to do anything, or would consider doing anything having seen the ads. Among those who recognised the ads (i.e. reported having seen them prior to the interview), 1 in 7 (14%) had already taken some action. This remains unchanged from 11% in 2023. In addition, 1 in 8 (13%) said there were actions that they planned to take or would consider taking (17% in 2023). By comparison, 17% of those who recognised the 2018 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign had already taken some action as a result of seeing that campaign. However, as the 'Exporting is GREAT' campaign had been running for a number of years it is possible that these were actions that had been taken over a longer period of time. It is also likely that businesses were more actively open to taking actions at that time, in preparation for the UK's exit from the EU.

Still among those who recognised the ads, specific actions already taken as a consequence of seeing the 2024 DBT campaigns were visiting the great.gov.uk website (3%, 1% in 2023) and visiting the DBT website (2%, 1% in 2023). A new code added in 2024, visiting DBT's great.gov.uk guidance and support pages was reported by 1% of businesses.

Combining actions already taken with those planned or considered, 21% of those who recognised the ads had either taken some action, planned to, or would consider doing so in future (Figure 11.11). The main action either taken, planned, or considered was visiting the great.gov.uk website (8%), with all other actions at or below 2%. This suggests that the campaigns are reasonably successful at prompting businesses to act if they are aware of them. However, overall awareness remains relatively low (11% MIUK, 4% UKEA); DBT should aim to increase overall awareness and recognition of campaigns and ensure clear signposting and calls to action to encourage more businesses to explore exporting.

Figure 11.11: Action taken, planned to take or will consider taken as a result of seeing ads (% of respondents who recognised ads)



Source: AD13A. What, if anything, have you done as a result of seeing or hearing these adverts? AD13B. And is there anything else that you plan to do, or will consider doing, as a result of seeing or hearing these adverts?

Base: All respondents who recognised at least one of the ads: 2024 wave 9: All £500,000+ turnover (119)

There were no differences in the impact of the campaigns on actions taken, planned or considered between those who recognised only the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign or the UK Export Academy (UKEA) campaign adverts, and those who recognised both 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' and UKEA campaigns.

12. Findings within the total registered business population

The preceding chapters in this report have focused on businesses with an annual turnover of £500,000 or more. This chapter will focus on findings relating to the total population of surveyed businesses, which also includes those with a turnover below £500,000.

The majority of the total registered business population is made up of small and micro businesses, and the data explored in this chapter are strongly influenced by these. In the total sample, £500,000+ turnover businesses were oversampled relative to their true proportion in the wider population, reflecting DBT's focus on high export potential businesses. This allowed for more robust sub-group analysis when examining the £500,000+ businesses, which were the primary focus of this report. However, as a caveat to this section, this sampling approach has limited the analysis of the total sample of all businesses. The weighting scheme required to compensate for the smaller proportion of lower turnover businesses resulted in a lower effective base size and larger margins of error around the all-business estimates.

Overall, results within the total registered business population align with those observed among businesses with a turnover of £500,000 or more. However, there were some slight differences that reflect the smaller nature of businesses in the total sample.

Key findings

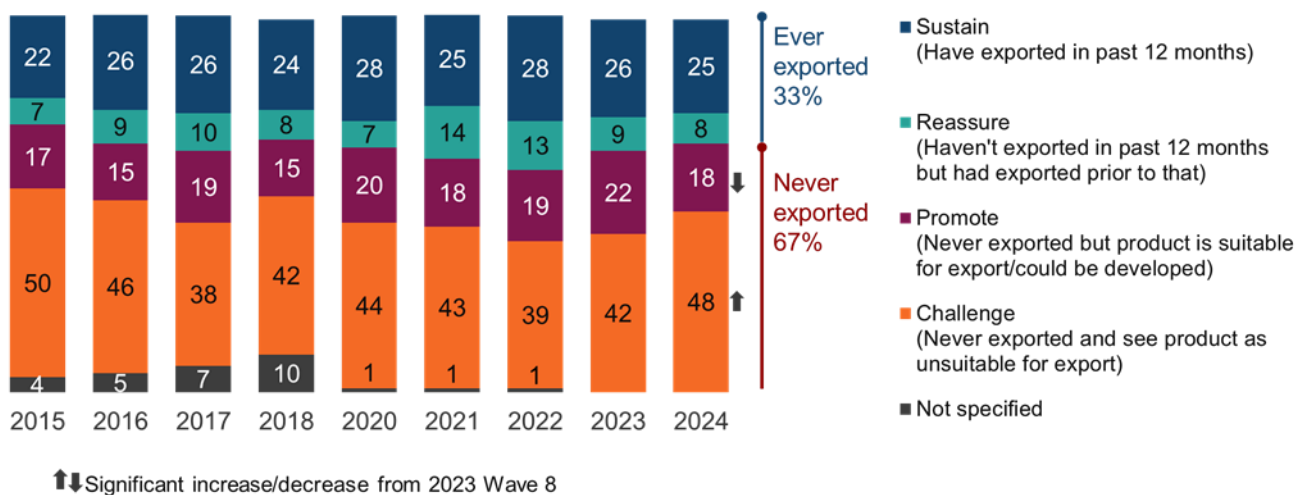
- a third of businesses (33%) in 2024 reported having ever exported, consistent with 2023 (36%) though continuing a decline from a peak of 41% in 2022 and returning to levels seen between 2015 and 2020 (29%-36%).
- almost 8 in 10 (77%) of businesses who have or could export had heard of FTAs, though just 2 in 10 (22%) reported any knowledge about them. Despite limited self-reported knowledge, over half (56%) agreed that FTAs will benefit their business.
- two thirds (66%) businesses reported having adequate supply chains to export. Less than 2 in 10 (17%) businesses stated that they were currently experiencing supply chain disruptions, a decrease from 29% in 2023. Disruptions were attributed to the UK's exit from the EU (65%), general economic or inflationary pressure (61%) or the cost of shipping (51%). Of those that had faced issues that were now resolved, 39% were able to use alternative suppliers or routes to export.
- of businesses that believed their product and services can be exported, 2 in 10 (19%) reported a high knowledge of how to export, an increase from 13% in 2023. Just over a third (33%) stated that they had poor or no knowledge of how to export, which was similar to 2023 (34%).
- in the total business population, over a third (38%) of businesses had growth as an integral part of their business plans, whilst 2 in 10 (22%) intended to grow their business but had no concrete plans on how to do this. A further 25% were aiming to consolidate instead and 15% were aiming to return to profitability first.
- just over 2 in 10 (22%) businesses believed UK exports would increase over the next 12 months, a decrease from 31% in 2023.
- one in 5 (21%) said they had seen any advertising, publicity, or other information to make them think about exporting in the last year or so. Respondents were then shown images from the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' campaign. Of those who could view these

images, 29% agreed that it was relevant to them, while 69% disagreed. Overall, when asked whether the adverts shown increased their interest in finding out more about exporting, 1 in 4 (25%) responded yes, whilst almost 3 in 4 (74%) responded no.

12.1 Exporting behaviours

Just over a third of all businesses said they had ever exported (33%), consistent with 2023 (36%) though this showed a continuing decline from a peak of 41% in 2022 and returning to levels seen between 2015 and 2020 (29%-36%). These proportions are similar to businesses with a turnover of £500,000 or more with 38% having ever exported, although a slightly higher proportion of the £500,000 or more group fell into the 'Sustain'⁴⁵ segment (32% compared with 25%). The proportion of businesses who had never exported continued to trend upwards (67%, compared with 64% in 2023), returning to 2015 levels (67%). In 2024, less than 1% fell into the 'unallocated' category, consistent with 2023.

Figure 12.1: Exporting segments (% of all respondents)



Source: Composite measure merging data from several variables

Base: All respondents: 2015 W1 / 2016 W2 / 2017 W3 / 2018 W4 / 2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / 2023 W8 / 2024 W9: Total (1,405 / 1,418 / 2,991 / 3,000 / 3,001 / 3,002 / 3,001 / 3,004 / 2,969)

As a proportion of all businesses, 11% stated that they had exported only goods in the last 12 months. This was higher among businesses with a turnover of £500,000 and above (15%) compared with of businesses with a turnover below £500,000 (9%). One in 10 (11%) had exported only services. Conversely to those exporting only goods, the proportion of businesses who had only exported services was higher among those below £500,000 (11%) compared to businesses £500,000 and above (8%). Overall, only a minority (3%) had exported both goods and services. However, this was higher among businesses £500,000 and above (5%) compared with businesses below £500,000 (3%).

Those businesses that had exported goods in the past 12 months (excluding exports to Republic of Ireland) were more likely to report a reduction in exports in the last year (44%) than an increase

⁴⁵ See section 3.5 'Segment Definitions' for a full explanation.

(18%). Among those exporting services (excluding exports to Republic of Ireland), the proportion was more favourable, with 27% stating they had increased and 19% decreased.

Among businesses that had never exported, three-quarters (73%) believed that their products or services would never be suitable for export, an increase from 66% in 2023. One quarter (27%) believed their products or services could potentially be developed for export, a decrease from 34% in 2023.

Less than 1 in 4 exporters (17%) reported taking an active approach to exporting, intentionally targeting customers in specific countries, a decrease from 23% in 2023, returning to 2022 levels (17%). This decrease was in line with what was observed in the £500,000+ group where 19% reported taking an active approach, down from 27% in 2023. Within the total business population, 4 in 5 (81%) reported a more passive approach (responding to orders from abroad when received, but not specifically targeting customers in other countries), an increase from 74% in 2023.

12.2 Barriers to exporting

Among all businesses (excluding those that could never export), there were no changes in reported capabilities and capacities for exporting between 2023 and 2024. However, there has been an incremental increase since 2020 in reported staff capacity, managerial time and capabilities to assess the cost of exporting and develop an exporting business plan (Figure 12.2). This is broadly consistent with the trends observed among businesses with a turnover of £500,000 or more, which have seen increases in some capabilities such as staff capacity (63%, up from 52% in 2023, 56% in 2020) and staff skills (69%, up from 61% in 2023).

Figure 12.2: Whether businesses have enough capacity and capability to focus on exporting (% saying 'yes')



⬆️⬆️ Significant increase/decrease from 2020 Wave 5

Source: Q31a - Thinking about your business' ability to start or continue exporting internationally, would you say that your business has enough of each of the following to focus on exporting.

Base: All businesses whose product is suitable for export: *2020 W5 / 2021 W6 / 2022 W7 / **2023 W8 / **2024 W9: Total (1,813 / 1,921 / 1,885 / 888 / 834)
*2020 Q2-Q4 only. **W8 and W9 half sample.

Respondents that had either exported to a core market, or had considered doing so but decided against it, were asked about barriers they faced when exporting to these markets. The following options were read out and the proportions citing each as a strong barrier were:

- Cost: 22%, statistically unchanged from 24% in 2022
- Time taken to comply with export procedures: 26%, statistically unchanged from 24% in 2022
- Access to contacts and networks: 19%, statistically unchanged from 23% in 2022
- Capacity to export and cater for international contracts: 11%, a decrease from 18% in 2022
- Lack of knowledge: 12%, statistically unchanged from 17% in 2022

12.3 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

Among all respondents who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export, almost 8 in 10 (77%) had heard of FTAs, though just 2 in 10 (22%) stated they have any knowledge about them, consistent with 78% and 23% respectively among businesses with £500,000 turnover or more.

Overall, just over half (54%) of businesses who have ever exported said their exports were eligible for benefits related to FTAs. Most commonly, these were the ability to easily transfer data between countries (30%) and reduced customs duties (25%). The proportion of businesses with £500,000 turnover or more that said their exports were eligible for any benefits was the same (54%), though they were slightly more likely to say their exports were eligible for reduced customs duties (31%).

Among those businesses whose goods or services are eligible for any FTA related benefits, 7 in 10 (74%) said that their exports benefitted at least some of the time, with 1 in 4 (24%) saying that they did so always or almost always.

Among all respondents who have ever exported or whose products could be developed for export, over half (56%) agreed that FTAs between the UK and other countries will benefit their business, while 19% disagreed. However, just over one quarter (28%) agreed that they are confident they would know how to trade through an FTA and 20% agreed that the government is providing information and support to help businesses access the benefits of FTAs (49% and 45% disagreed with these statements, respectively).

To find information and support on FTAs, respondents most commonly reported that they would refer to GOV.UK (79%), business or professional contacts (59%), or the UK government (general mentions), including DBT (57%).

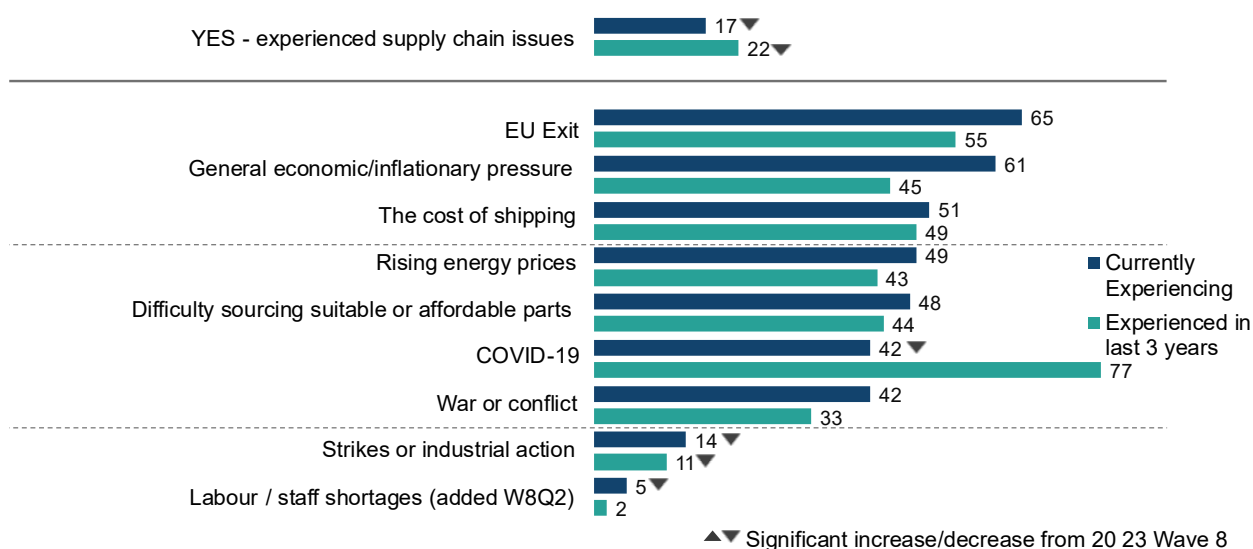
12.4 Supply chains

In 2024, two thirds (66%) reported adequate supply chains to start or continue exporting. This is a significant increase from 2022 (57%), and part of a general improvement in recent years, although the increases from, 2021 and 2023 (61% and 60% respectively) are not significant. Among all businesses, 2 in 5 (44%) had any experience of supply chain disruptions, with less than 2 in 10

(17%) reporting they were currently experiencing these, both of which decreased since 2023 (57% and 29%, respectively). One in 5 (22%) reported they had experienced supply chain disruptions within the last three years which were now resolved, down from 26% in 2023. Findings are consistent with businesses with £500,000 turnover or more, among whom 53% had any experience of supply chain disruptions and 19% were currently experiencing these, down from 62% and 31% respectively in 2023.

As shown in Figure 12.3, among those currently experiencing supply chain disruptions, two thirds (65%) attributed this to the UK's exit from the EU, 6 in 10 (61%) to general economic or inflationary pressure and half (51%) to the cost of shipping. Four in 10 (42%) attributed current supply chain disruptions to COVID-19, a decrease from 55% in 2023. Among businesses reporting supply chain disruptions that were now resolved, 4 in 10 (39%) were able to use alternative suppliers or routes to export.

Figure 12.3: Experience of and cause of supply chain issues (% of respondents experiencing / experienced supply chain issues within last 3 years)



Source: SCHAIN2. Which of the following do you feel caused the supply chain issues you are currently experiencing/experienced within the last 3 years but now resolved?

Base: All respondents who are currently experiencing supply chain issues, All respondents who have experienced supply chain issues within the last 3 years but which have now been resolved. Total 2024 wave 9 (577 / 786)

12.5 Knowledge, information and support

Of businesses that believed their product and services could be exported, 2 in 10 (19%) reported a high knowledge of how to export, an increase from 13% in 2023. A third (33%) stated that they had poor or no knowledge of how to export, similar to 2023 (34%). There were no differences in either high or low knowledge between businesses with a turnover below £500,000 compared with businesses £500,000 and above.

One quarter (25%) of businesses reported a high level of knowledge of where to go for information about exporting, unchanged from 2023 (24%) and with no difference by business turnover (25% of businesses below £500,000, 27% of businesses £500,000 and above). However, the proportion of all businesses reporting poor or no knowledge of where to go for information increased from 17%

in 2023 to 24% in 2024. This was higher among businesses below £500,000 (26%) compared with 21% of businesses £500,000 and above, both of which increased since 2023 (19% of businesses below £500,000, 13% of businesses £500,000 and above).

Similarly, the proportion of all businesses reporting a high level of knowledge of where to go for help and support with exporting was unchanged in 2024 (23%) compared to 2023 (23%). However, the proportion reporting poor or no knowledge increased from 19% in 2023 to 24% in 2024, with no difference by turnover (25% of businesses below £500,000, 22% of businesses £500,000 and above).

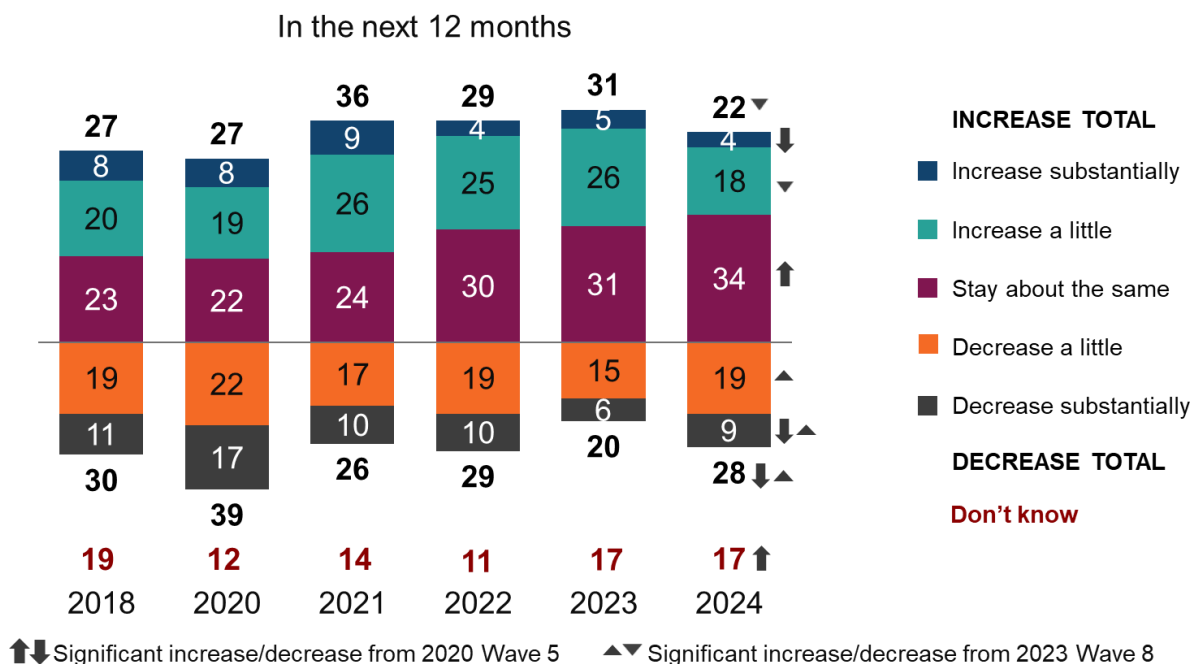
Of those businesses who have exported or could potentially export, just over a third (35%) said they had ever sought advice or support with exporting, with very little year-on-year change since 2015.

12.6 Expectations for growth and trade

In the total business population, almost 4 in 10 (38%) of all businesses had growth as an integral part of their business (35% of businesses below £500,000, 43% of businesses £500,000 and above), whilst 2 in 10 (22%) intended to grow their business but had no concrete plans how to do this (down from 29% in 2023). Rather than growing the business, a further 1 in 4 (25%) were aiming to consolidate instead (27% of businesses below £500,000, 20% of businesses £500,000 and above), and another 15% were aiming to return to profitability first.

Overall, 22% of all businesses thought the total UK export value will increase over the next 12 months, a decrease from 31% in 2023 (see Figure 12.4). This was higher among of businesses with a turnover of £500,000 and above (24%) compared with those below £500,000 (20%). Correspondingly, the proportion of businesses who thought the total export value will decrease was higher in 2024 (28%) compared with 2023 (20%), though remained lower than 2020 (39%).

Figure 12.4: Whether businesses believe UK exports will increase or decrease in the next 12 months (% of all respondents)



Source: Q40b Thinking about UK exports over the next 12 months or so, do you think that the total value of exports by UK businesses will...

Base: All respondents 2018 wave 4 / 2020 wave 5 / 2021 wave 6 / 2022 wave 7* / 2023 wave 8* / 2024 wave 9*: Total (3,000 / 3,001 / 3,002 / 1,497 / 1,514 / 1,487)

*W7/W8/W9 asked of random half sample

In contrast, when cross-referenced with other exporting attitudes metrics, businesses were more optimistic about levels of demand. Agreement that there is a lot of demand for UK goods or services around the world increased to 65% following a decline in recent years (59% in 2021, 53% in 2022 and 50% in 2023). This indicates an improvement in expectations of demand, though proportions remain below 2018 when a peak figure of 73% was recorded.

Other statements exploring attitudes to exporting provide further evidence for mixed views. Of businesses that do export or could export, over a third (37%) felt there would not be enough demand for their business overseas to make exporting worthwhile, similar to 2023 (35%). In addition, just over half (52%) felt that there is a lot of opportunity for their business to grow internationally, compared with 50% in 2023.

There are also indications that some businesses may be looking beyond exporting to facilitate growth. Just under half (48%) agreed that there are enough opportunities for growth within the UK to mean their business is not interested in exports (47% in 2023). Meanwhile, 2 in 5 (40%) of businesses felt that there are too many risks in taking a business international, unchanged from 2023 and 2022 (both 40%).

12.7 Advertising and Campaign metrics

One in 5 (21%) of all businesses said they had seen any advertising, publicity or other information to make them think about exporting. Though not a significant decrease in the last year, this continues a year-on-year decline from 36% in 2021. These findings are in line with trends among businesses with a turnover of £500,000 or more. Recognition of any DBT campaign ('Made in the UK, Sold to the World' / UK Export Academy / great.gov help and support services) was at 14%.

Recognition of the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' adverts was 10% (12% in 2023). Recognition of adverts relating to the UK Export Academy was 4% and great.gov help and support services was 3%.

When businesses were asked where they had seen any advertising or information, 8% of all businesses were aware of internet advertising, 5% for radio, 4% for TV, 3% for social media and 2% for print. This is similar to the proportions reported in 2023, except for TV recognition which was lower compared with 2023 (4% from 8%) and print (2% from 4%).

Around 7 in 10 (71%) businesses reported that the government was responsible for this advertising (down from 79% in 2023), with the UK government more generally (54%) being the most prominent response (although again down from 66% in 2023). Recognition of the Department for Business and Trade (or Department for International Trade (DIT)) was 14% (unchanged from 14% in 2023), and trade associations was 4%, whilst all other sources were 2% or below. Of the businesses that were aware of information or advertising, very few businesses were able to recall details or elements from the advertising that they have seen. One in 10 (10%) recalled the advertising mentioning 'export advice/webinar/workshop' support (up from 5% in 2023). Fewer than 1 in 10 mentioned responses relating to GOV.UK / HM Government / UK government logo (7%), growing sales/opportunities abroad (5%) or the GREAT logo (4%). Awareness of any other elements from advertising were at 3% or below.

As described in section 11.5, after viewing the DBT materials from the 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World', those able to view the MIUK ads⁴⁶ were asked a series of questions designed to assess the effectiveness of the advertising activity. These questions were asked after viewing the MIUK materials only, so respondents were only considering the MIUK campaign and not the UK Export Academy or great.gov help and support services.

One in 4 (25%) of those able to view the campaign materials said that they had increased their interest in finding out more about exporting, consistent with 2023 (21%).

There was mixed evidence of shifts in attitudes towards the advertising in 2024 compared with 2023.

- almost 3 in 10 (29%) agreed that the advertising was relevant to them, while 69% disagreed, representing a positive shift from 21% who agreed and 77% who disagreed in 2023
- four in 10 (42%) agreed that the advertising told them something new, compared with 56% who said that it did not, representing a negative shift from 49% who agreed and 48% who disagreed in 2023
- just over half (53%) agreed that the adverts made it clear where to go for exporting information, compared with 46% who disagreed, representing a negative shift from 62% who agreed and 36% who disagreed in 2023
- almost two-thirds (65%) said that they trusted the information in the adverts, compared with 30% that did not, unchanged from 2023 (also 65% and 30%, respectively)
- just under half (46%) agreed that the adverts made them realise the government can help them to export, compared with 50% that did not, consistent with 2023 when 50% agreed and 46% disagreed
- one in 3 (30%) agreed that the adverts showed that new trade deals are creating opportunities for businesses like theirs, compared with 66% that disagreed, consistent with 2023 when 26% agreed and 70% disagreed

⁴⁶ The vast majority of those able to access the website and view one screen of campaign materials were able to view all of them.

- overall, when asked whether the adverts shown increased their interest in exploring exporting options finding out more about exporting, 25% responded yes, unchanged from 21% in 2023, whilst 74% responded no, unchanged from 78% in 2023. However, only 25% stated that the adverts had made them think about exploring export options (unchanged from 23% in 2023)

All businesses (excluding those that could never export) were asked about their awareness of government export support services. Of this group, 66% were aware of any support service, down from 73% in 2023. Just under half (46%) said they were aware of GOV.UK tools such as 'Check how to export goods' or 'Check duties and customs procedures for exporting goods', down from 62% in 2023. There was also some awareness of GOV.UK services 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers'⁴⁷ (30%), and International Trade Advisors (28%). Awareness of the Export Support Service and/or 'Ask the export support team a question' on GOV.UK decreased from 23% in 2023 to 18% in 2024. Less than 2 in 10 were aware of Help to Grow (19%), great.gov.uk (17%), UK export licensing system (LITE and SPIRE) (16%), and the Import case management system (ICMS), or the service to apply for an import licence or export certificate (12%)⁴⁷.

⁴⁷New items introduced into the 2024 wave 9 survey were GOV.UK services 'report a trade barrier' or 'check international trade barriers', Help to Grow, great.gov.uk, UK export licensing system (LITE and SPIRE), and the Import case management system (ICMS), or the service to apply for an import licence or export certificate

About the Department for Business and Trade

The Department for Business and Trade is an economic growth department. We ensure fair, competitive markets at home, secure access to new markets abroad and support businesses to invest, export and grow. Our priorities are the Industrial Strategy, Make Work Pay, the Trade Strategy and the Plan for Small Business.

Legal disclaimer

Whereas every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this document is accurate, the Department for Business and Trade does not accept liability for any errors, omissions or misleading statements, and no warranty is given or responsibility accepted as to the standing of any individual, firm, company or other organisation mentioned.

Copyright

© Crown Copyright 2025

You may re-use this publication (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence visit:

nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information in the material that you wish to use, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holder(s) concerned.

This document is also available on our website at gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-and-trade

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

enquiries@businessandtrade.gov.uk.

Published by Department for Business and Trade

14 August 2025