Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2016

For each of the last 13 years, the Institute of Business Ethics has asked the British public about its view on how ethical British Business is. This infographic shows the attitudes of the British public to business ethics in 2016.

Current business behaviour

For the first time in four years, less than half of the British public (48%) believe that British business is behaving ethically.

However, there was also a 12% increase in the number of respondents who did not express an opinion compared to 2015 (a change in methodology in 2016 may account for some of this shift in perception).

Issues of most concern

Corporate tax avoidance 43%
Executive pay 28%
Exploitative labour 26%
Work-home balance for employees 21%
Protection of customer data/data privacy 16%
Current business behaviour

How ethically do you think British business generally behaves?

In 2016, the perception of the general public is that British business behaviour is not as ethical as it has been in recent years. For the first time since 2012, those that view British business as behaving ethically fell below 50%.

This shift in perception could be driven by a significantly higher proportion of respondents who did not venture an opinion one way or another. On the other hand, those that consider British business to be behaving unethically varied little over the same period.

The 2016 results mirror almost exactly the results of 2012.

Research Methodology

The research is conducted on behalf of the IBE by Ipsos MORI. This year the study moved from face-to-face interviewing to online surveying. In 2016, a total of 2000 respondents completed an online survey between 21st September and 27th September 2016 and data has been weighted to reflect the adult population (18-65) in the UK in terms of age, gender, region, class, ethnicity, housing tenure and occupational status.

47% 51% 54% 58% 54% 51% 52% 59% 58% 48% 59% 58% 59% 59%
41% 36% 33% 32% 36% 43% 36% 29% 33% 37% 38% 40% 39% 38%
11% 12% 13% 10% 10% 6% 12% 12% 9% 15% 4% 2% 2% 14%

There is a lot of discussion these days about how ethically business is behaving - that is, how far its behaviour and decisions follow good principles. How ethically do you think British business generally behaves?

- Ethically
- Unethically
- Unsure (no opinion)

Changes in methodology

Differences by Subgroup: age, gender, occupational status and education

General population

This year there was no significant difference in responses across age, gender and occupational status.

Graduates are the most likely to express an opinion.

Graduates

Those with a university degree are the most likely subgroup to think British business is behaving unethically (45%).
Issues of most concern

The top 3 issues of concern remain unchanged for a third consecutive year.
Work-home balance for employees enters the top 5. Protection of customer data/data privacy (introduced in 2014) became a top 5 issue of concern for the first time.

Corporate tax avoidance remains the number one concern of the British public and has seen the biggest increase in prominence between 2015-2016. On average, it has been trending upwards since being introduced to the survey in 2012.

The top three issues: corporate tax, executive pay and exploitative labour were all topics discussed in the media this year.

Notable changes in attitudes since 2012

Research Methodology The research is conducted on behalf of the IBE by Ipsos MORI. This year the study moved from face-to-face interviewing to online surveying. In 2016, a total of 2000 respondents completed an online survey between 21st September and 27th September 2016 and data has been weighted to reflect the adult population (18-65) in the UK in terms of age, gender, region, class, ethnicity, housing tenure and occupational status [2015 base = 1130 GB Adults 16+ asked face-to-face until 2015].
**Issues of most concern continued**

In your view of company behaviour, which two or three issues most need addressing?

**Rising issues**

- **Exploitative labour** continues to rise. This is unsurprising given its attention in the media in 2016.
- **Protection of customer data/data privacy** has seen a significant increase in prominence between 2015-2016.
- **Work-home balance** has risen to a top 5 position for the first time since being introduced 11 years ago.

**Falling issues**

- **Advertising and marketing practices** have seen the biggest fall between 2015-2016, now being the least cited concern of the British public.
- **Bribery and corruption** continues on a downward trend since 2012.
- **Human rights** has returned to a level similar to that of when it was first introduced in 2011 after stagnating between 2013-2015.

**Spotlight on Gender**

**Women** are more concerned about environmental responsibility, human rights and discrimination compared to men.

**Men** are more concerned about executive pay, treatment of suppliers and exploitative labour than women.

**Notable changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concern about workplace harassment/bullying by gender**

- **Women** have been consistently more concerned about workplace harassment and bullying than men until 2016, when the gap has all but closed.
- **Men** have been consistently more concerned than women about executive pay and corporate tax avoidance over the history of the survey.

*“Exploitative labour” changed in 2014 from “sweatshop labour”*

**Research Methodology** The research is conducted on behalf of the IBE by Ipsos MORI. This year the study moved from face-to-face interviewing to online surveying. In 2016, a total of 2000 respondents completed an online survey between 21st September and 27th September 2016 and data has been weighted to reflect the adult population (18-65) in the UK in terms of age, gender, region, class, ethnicity, housing tenure and occupational status. [2015 base = 1130 GB Adults 16+ asked face-to-face until 2015].

© IBE, December 2016
Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2016

Issues of most concern continued

In your view of company behaviour, which two or three issues most need addressing?

Spotlight on Age

18-34 year old respondents are more concerned about discrimination and human rights compared to 35-54s and 55+ respondents.

Notable changes

Distinguishing by sub-group from 2007, respondents between the ages of 18–34 have been consistently more likely to report discrimination compared to older respondents. Concern about discrimination has plateaued amongst respondents over the age of 55 since 2014.

Compared to the total, respondents between the ages of 18-34 have been less concerned about corporate tax avoidance until 2016 when the figures converged.

Spotlight on Occupational Status

ABC1 respondents are more concerned about corporate tax avoidance and work-home balance for employees compared to C2DE respondents.

Notable changes

Both ABC1 and C2DE respondents have consistently followed the overall trend in concern for work-home balance. ABC1 respondents have steadily reported above average concern, whilst C2DE respondents have reported below average concern.

Research Methodology

The research is conducted on behalf of the IBE by Ipsos MORI. This year the study moved from face-to-face interviewing to online surveying. In 2016, a total of 2000 respondents completed an online survey between 21st September and 27th September 2016 and data has been weighted to reflect the adult population (18-65) in the UK in terms of age, gender, region, class, ethnicity, housing tenure and occupational status [2015 base = 1130 GB Adults 16+ asked face-to-face until 2015].
The IBE was established in 1986 to encourage high standards of business behaviour based on ethical values.

Our vision is to lead the dissemination of knowledge and good practice in business ethics.

We raise public awareness of the importance of doing business ethically, and collaborate with other UK and international organisations with interests and expertise in business ethics.

We help organisations to strengthen their ethics culture through effective and relevant ethics programmes.

The IBE is a registered charity, supported by subscriptions from businesses and other organisations, as well as individuals. Charity no. 1084014