

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 9

meeting date: THURSDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2018
title: RIBBLE VALLEY BUSINESS SURVEY
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive information on the Ribble Valley Business Survey.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the borough.
- Community Objectives – The issues highlighted in this report are relevant to the objectives of a strong and sustainable economy in the borough.
- Corporate Priorities – Delivery of services to all.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy highlights the continued need for development of the economy in Ribble Valley as an important factor towards the overall aim of building a strong, prosperous and sustainable borough. This report contains information of some headline business needs following the outcome of the Ribble Valley Business Survey.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 Ribble Valley Borough Council has a role to support local businesses and drive economic growth in the area. It does this in a number of ways, including offering advice, support and information to local businesses. Businesses in Ribble Valley are also supported by local and regional partners including Lancashire County Council, Boost Business Lancashire and a range of other business organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce.

3.2 The Council's current evidence base is primarily represented by a number of studies that were prepared to inform the Core Strategy and it is notable that the wider economic context is changing and therefore it is important that the borough's future growth prospects are understood.

3.3 As part of this, the Council's Regeneration and Economic Development Team identified the need to commission a local business survey to build a richer picture of Ribble Valley's businesses, how they are changing, what their needs are and the support they require to grow and prosper. Within this context, this will enable the Council to further plan positively to support the continued economic growth of the borough. This includes, for example, maximising opportunities for employment, productivity and growth whilst at the same time addressing issues that affect business performance, growth and investment and the wider labour market.

- 3.4 A copy of the report is attached at Appendix A. This outlines both a profile of those businesses who responded and a range of sections on key themes, such as operating in Ribble Valley, business premises, economic drivers and barriers to growth, recruitment and skills and business support. An internet approach was adopted due to the costs associated with other methods such as telephone and postal surveys.
- 3.5 The Council promoted the survey to businesses through its website and social media, and also local business contacts, networks and organisations were encouraged to share the survey with their own contacts. Information has been gathered on a range of key matters including premises, business confidence and growth aspirations, location and environment issues and skills and staff recruitment amongst others in order to build a picture of current economic and business conditions.
- 3.6 In summarising the responses received, the most common reason given by respondents for operating their business in Ribble Valley is that it is where they are from (58%). Other popular reasons given were the quality of the environment, nature of the local economy, local demand or identifying a gap in the market and the quality of the premises available.
- 3.7 Also, the image of the area is considered most important in a business's location, and more so amongst the accommodation and food services sector. A range of comments were also received about their existing business space, with the most common themes being size and suitability of the premises for growth as well as wider issues relating to roads, parking and traffic.
- 3.8 The businesses who responded that have been operating for more than 20 years are more likely to own their business premises and to be employing more staff. However, lack of staff or skills is considered the biggest barrier to growth, followed by access to markets and sales opportunities with the latter seen to be less of an issue amongst businesses with an increased turnover.
- 3.9 As stated earlier, more detailed information is contained in the report attached at Appendix A and the issues identified will also help us to highlight areas where further work can be developed to support appropriate economic growth which will be explored further in the economic strategy review.

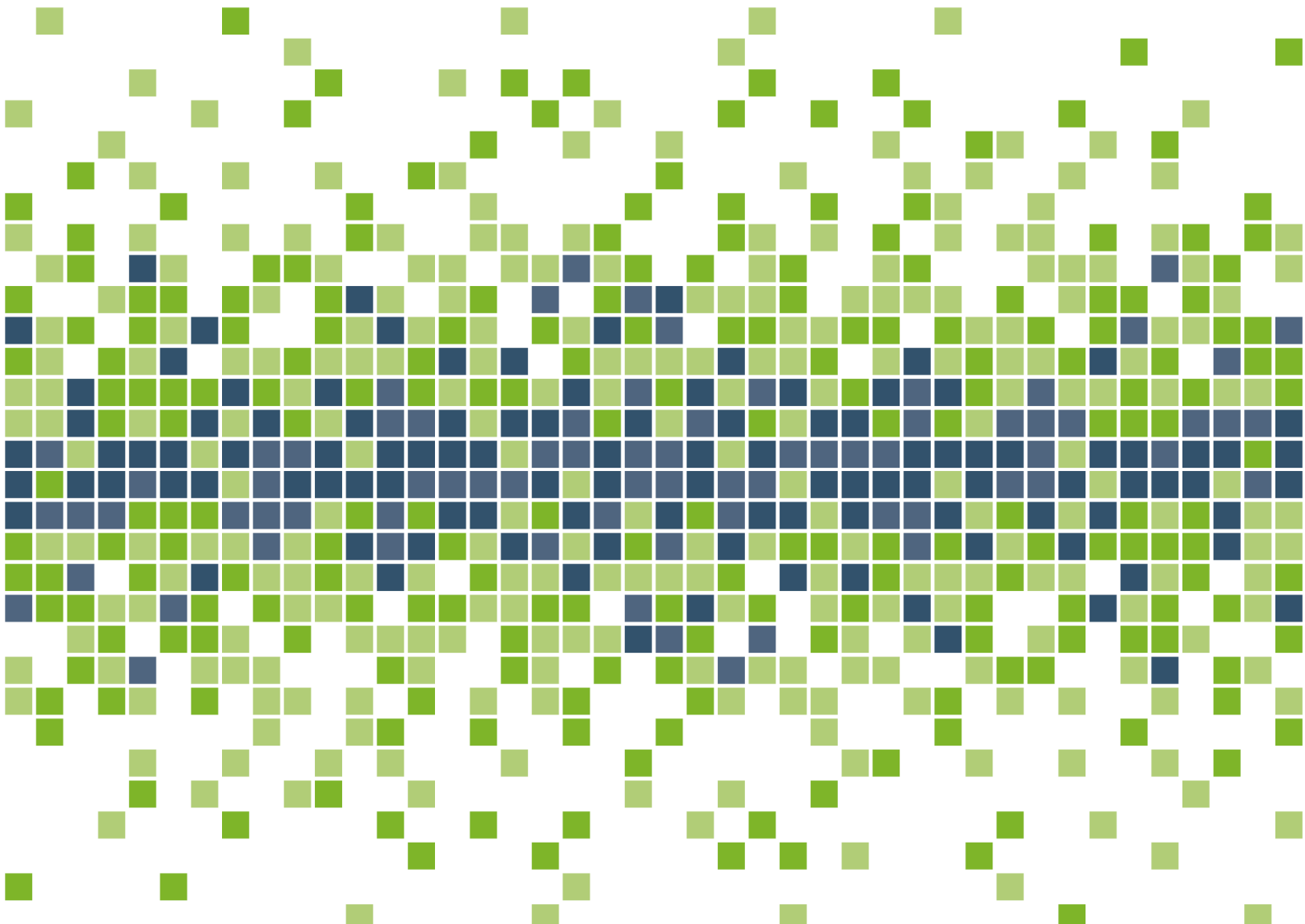
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Ribble Valley Business Survey

Research Report August 2018



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Executive Summary

Overview

The inaugural Ribble Valley Business Survey was undertaken in June and July 2018 to better understand the borough's businesses, how they are changing, what their needs are and the support they require to grow and prosper.

An online survey ran for 7 weeks, during which time **117 responses were received from local businesses**. The findings provide an insight into performance and challenges of Ribble Valley's business community.

Business make-up and performance

- Businesses operating for more than 20 years are more likely to own their business premises and to be employing more staff
- 7 in 10 businesses identify their key market as local or regional, with the accommodation and food sector more likely than others to identify UK and beyond as a key market for them
- There is an even split of turnover levels within the business sample, with the wholesale and retail sector most likely to be turning over more than £500k
- More businesses have experienced an increase in turnover over the last 12 months than have seen a decrease
- Those businesses operating for at least 10 years were more likely to report a fall in turnover whilst there is a noticeable improvement in the performance of businesses with a turnover of £85k or more

Operating in Ribble Valley

- The sample of businesses generally operate in the area because it is where they are from, particularly those in the wholesale and retail sector
- Those businesses which have increased turnover in the last 12 months are more likely than others to be operating in Ribble Valley because of the nature of the local economy
- Image of the area is considered most important in a business's location, more so amongst the accommodation and food services sector
- Access to a customer base is considered more important by the wholesale and retail sector
- Availability of parking was identified as the biggest location issue amongst responding businesses, with this highest amongst those that experienced a decrease in turnover during the last 12 months

Business premises

- Satisfaction with existing premises is high amongst the responding businesses with just 5% of the 117 sample indicating that they are dissatisfied
- A range of comments were received about their existing business space, with the most common themes being size and suitability of the premises for growth as well as wider issues relating to roads, parking and traffic
- Around two thirds of businesses have not tried to expand or move during the last 12 months; of those that have close to half are still in the process and the main problems experienced seeming to be striking a balance between location and suitability of the premises
- More than a third of responding businesses indicated that their requirements for premises are likely to change in the next 5 years with a range of specifics provided including additional customer facilities and more space for growth and staff

Recruitment and skills

- Around 3 in 5 businesses have tried to recruit new staff in the last 2 years, with this higher amongst more established businesses
- And of those businesses that have tried to recruit, 2 in 3 have experienced difficulties although less so in the wholesale and retail sector
- The main difficulties experienced are attracting the right quality of candidate, particularly for certain skillsets and industries such as engineers, drivers and chefs
- Around two thirds of businesses have not tried to expand or move during the last 12 months; of those that have close to half are still in the process and the main problems experienced seeming to be striking a balance between location and suitability of the premises
- Half of responding businesses recruit new staff through word of mouth with social media more popular in the accommodation and food sector
- Around 2 in 5 respondents feel there are no skills gaps within their business, rising to half of those that have experienced a decrease in turnover during the last 12 months
- Of those businesses recognising a skills gap, the most common selection is IT skills around adopting new technologies and online services
- Public transport is considered an issue which is causing problems to businesses around staff travel

Growth and support

- Responding businesses consider the products and services they provide to be the biggest driver of growth for their business
- Lack of staff or skills is considered the biggest barrier to growth, followed by access to markets and sales opportunities with the latter seen to be less of an issue amongst businesses with an increased turnover
- Access to superfast broadband appears to be a bigger barrier for businesses who have experienced growth in the last 12 months

- Half of businesses in the response sample are planning to invest in marketing and PR over the next 2 years whilst those businesses with a fall in turnover are more likely than others to have no investment plans
- More than 3 in 5 businesses have accessed information or advice from an accountant or solicitor over the last 2 years
- Those businesses with an increased turnover during the last 12 months appear much more likely to have accessed information and advice than those whose turnover decreased
- Looking ahead, businesses appear most likely to seek support or advice around improving their online and digital presence over the next 2 years, particularly those businesses under 2 years old and those with an increased turnover

Observations and recommendations

1. There are some noticeably different attitudes and approaches between businesses that have experienced an increase in turnover and those that have seen a decrease. It is unclear whether turnover performance is attributable to sector and economic conditions or if it is influenced by these attitudes and approaches.

Initial recommendation: Consider how the wider Ribble Valley business network can learn from the approaches and patterns of well performing businesses. This is certainly the case when it comes to accessing support, advice and information services.

2. Some businesses are struggling to attract key skills to the area like engineers and chefs, with lack of staff and skills considered the key barrier to growth.

Initial recommendation: Follow up with some conversations and discussions with business leaders in these sectors to understand if this is an issue and how they are dealing with it.

3. There is at least a perception amongst businesses that the availability of public transport is having an impact on staff travel and recruitment, more so than the road network and traffic.

Initial recommendation: Review the provision and availability of public transport between Ribble Valley and neighbouring towns and areas to understand if this is an issue.

4. Parking was identified as the biggest issue for business location, although it is considered less important relative to other priorities such as the image of the area and access to a customer base.

Initial recommendation: No specific recommendation.

5. Demand for support and advice around online and digital services is likely to grow in the future, particularly given some businesses recognise they lack IT and digital skills.

Initial recommendation: Review availability of business support services provided by the council and partners in Ribble Valley.

Background and methodology

Background

Ribble Valley Borough Council has a role to support local businesses and drive economic growth in the area. It does this in a number of ways including offering business support and advice and economic regeneration strategy and projects. Businesses in Ribble Valley are also supported by local and regional partners including Lancashire County Council, Boost and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Council's Regeneration and Economic Development Team identified the need to commission a local business survey to build a richer picture of Ribble Valley's businesses, how they are changing, what their needs are and the support they require to grow and prosper.

Pearson Insight was commissioned to deliver the 2018 survey.

This report outlines the methodology underpinning the survey, a profile of those businesses who responded and a range of sections on key themes including:

- Operating in Ribble Valley
- Business premises
- Drivers and barriers to growth
- Recruitment and skills
- Business support

Methodology

This was the first Ribble Valley business survey and subsequently there was no previous methodology or survey content to work from.

It was agreed that an open-access online approach be adopted due to the costs associated with other methodologies such as telephone interviewing and postal surveys. Due to the online methodology there were no sampling or stratification requirements.

Ribble Valley Borough Council maintains a comprehensive database of local businesses and this was the primary resource for inviting businesses to take part in the survey. In addition, local networks and organisations were encouraged to share the survey with their contacts and the council also promoted the survey to businesses through social media.

The online survey went live on 11 June 2018 and closed on 29 July 2018, a period of 7 weeks. During this time a number of reminders were sent to businesses.

In total, 117 responses were received to the 2018 Ribble Valley Business Survey. Due to the open-access nature of the survey, the data within this report has not been weighted by sector or business size.

Business profiling

Sector and age

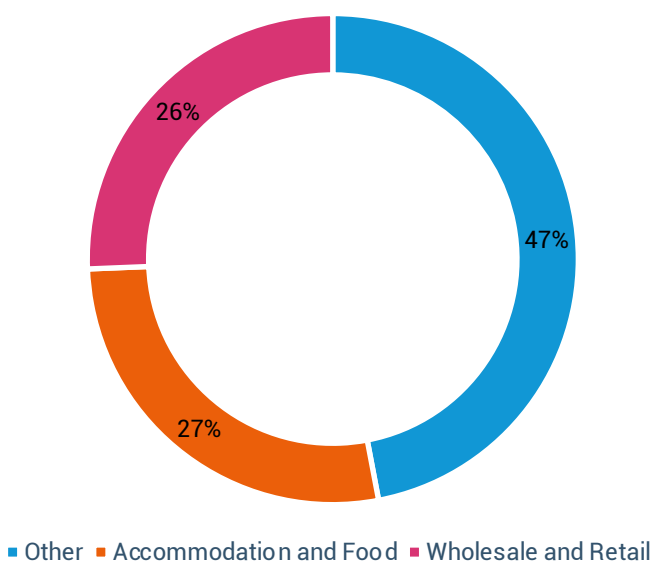
A significant proportion of respondents identified 'other' as their business sector.

Figure 1: Raw sector selections by business respondents (n = 114)

Label	Value
Other	28
Accommodation and Food Services	25
Wholesale	22
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	14
Real Estate and Professional	9
Manufacturing	4
Construction	4
Financial and Insurance Activities	4
Agriculture	1
Mining and Quarrying	1
Power and Water Supply	1
Human Health and Social Work	1

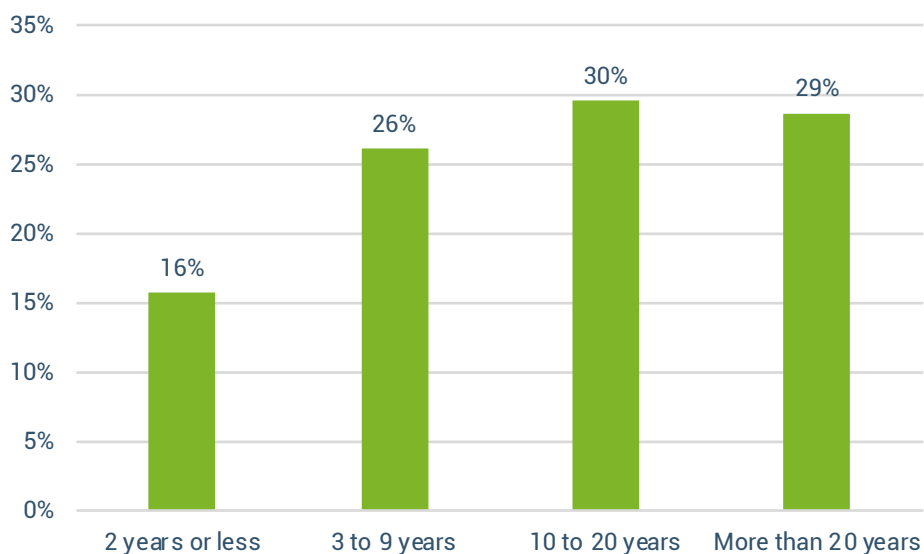
However, the business sector for each respondent has been re-categorised into 3 groups to enable some broad analysis throughout this report. The re-cast 'other' category accounts for nearly half of respondents given the wide variety of business types within it, including legal and professional services, engineering and manufacturing companies and logistics.

Figure 2: Broad sector categories for analysis (n = 114)



Of those businesses who responded, around 3 in 5 have been operating for at least 10 years. 16% are less than 2 years old.

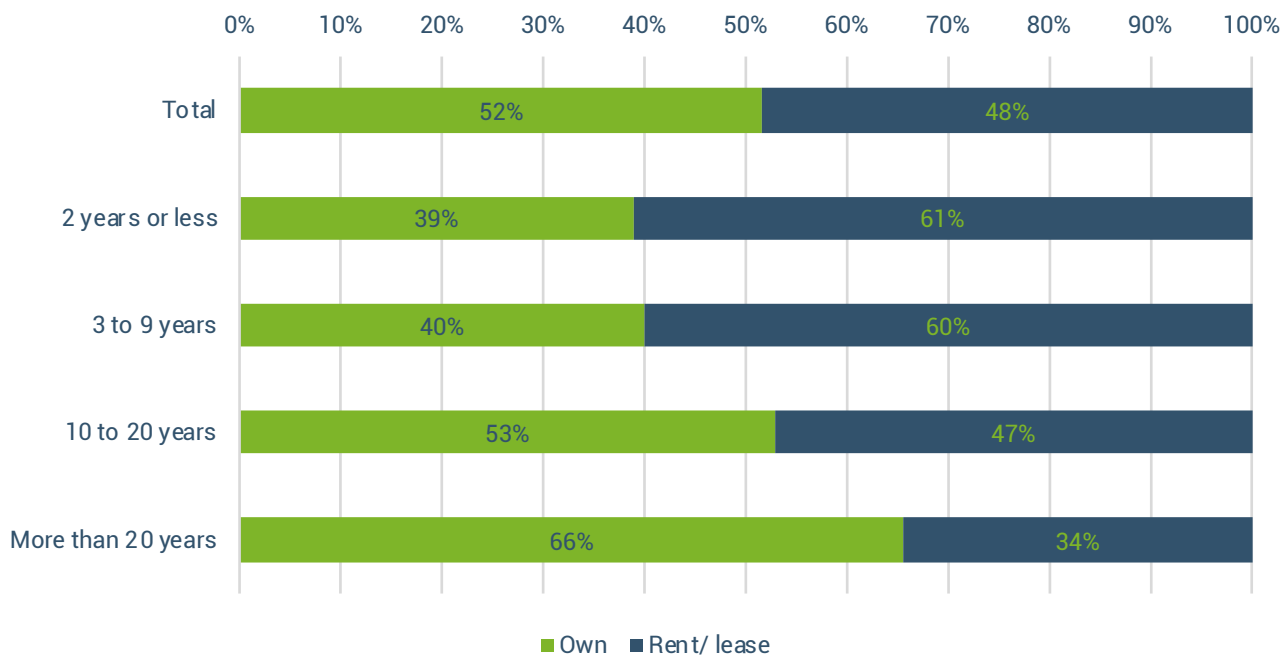
Figure 3: How long businesses have been trading (n = 115)



Set up and focus

There is an even split in the sample of businesses operating from a space they own and a space they rent or lease. It is noticeable that ownership increases the older the business is.

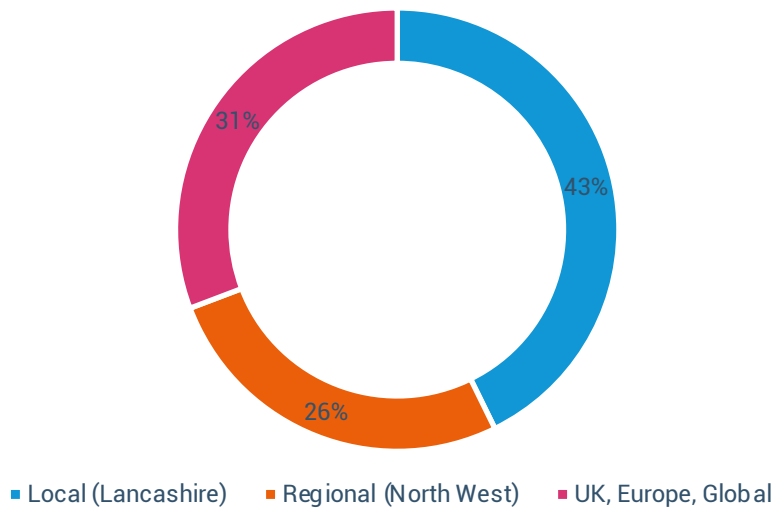
Figure 4: Ownership of business premises by number of years trading (n = 116)



84% of the responding businesses are independent. A small number were either a branch/ subsidiary of a larger group or a Head Office.

Just over 2 in 5 of businesses that responded to the survey identified the local Lancashire market as their key market. The accommodation and food sector were more likely than other groups to identify the UK, Europe and beyond as their key market.

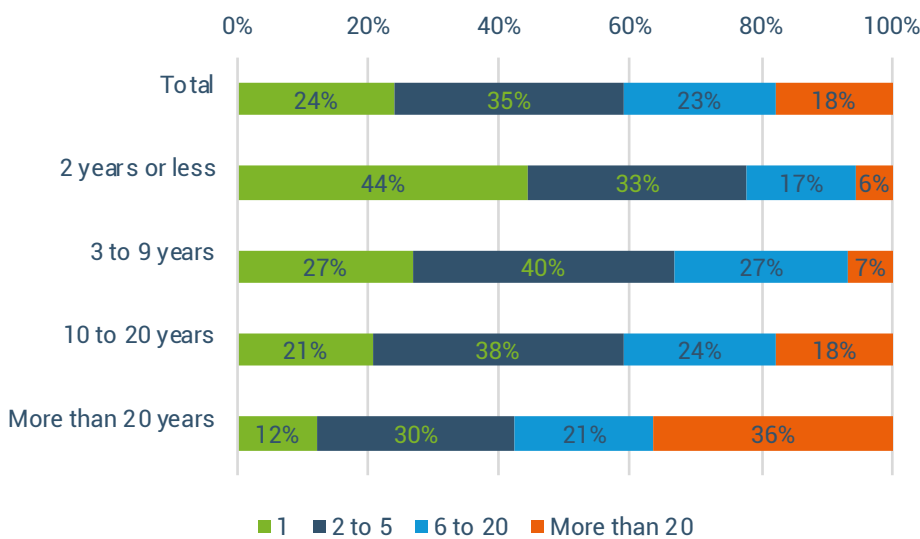
Figure 5: Key market focus (n = 117)



Size and performance

Around 1 in 4 respondents are single employee businesses, rising to 44% of businesses under 2 years old. As might be expected, those businesses operating for longer generally are more likely to have a higher number of employees.

Figure 6: Number of employees by age of business (n = 117)

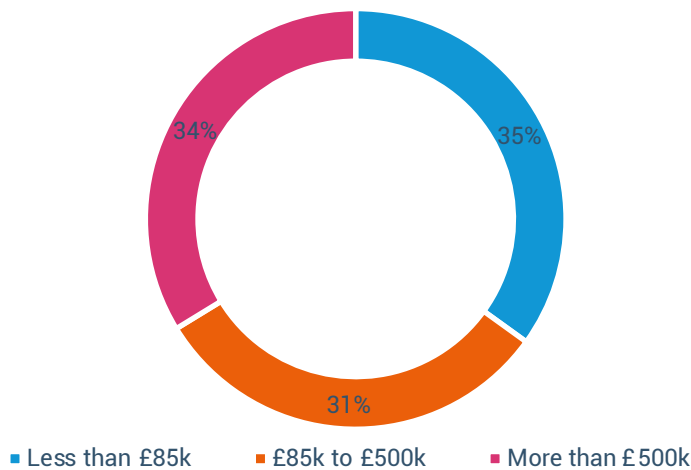


83 of the 117 respondents indicated the turnover of their business over the last year. There is an even split in the sample of those with a turnover under the VAT threshold, £85k-£500k and above £500k.

Whilst some caution should be applied to the sample size, there does appear to be a pattern between turnover and age of business. Two thirds of businesses under the age of two are turned over less than £85k in the last year whilst half of businesses that have been operating for more than 20 years turned over £500k or more.

The wholesale and retail sector appear more likely than those in the accommodation and food sector to be turning over more than £500k.

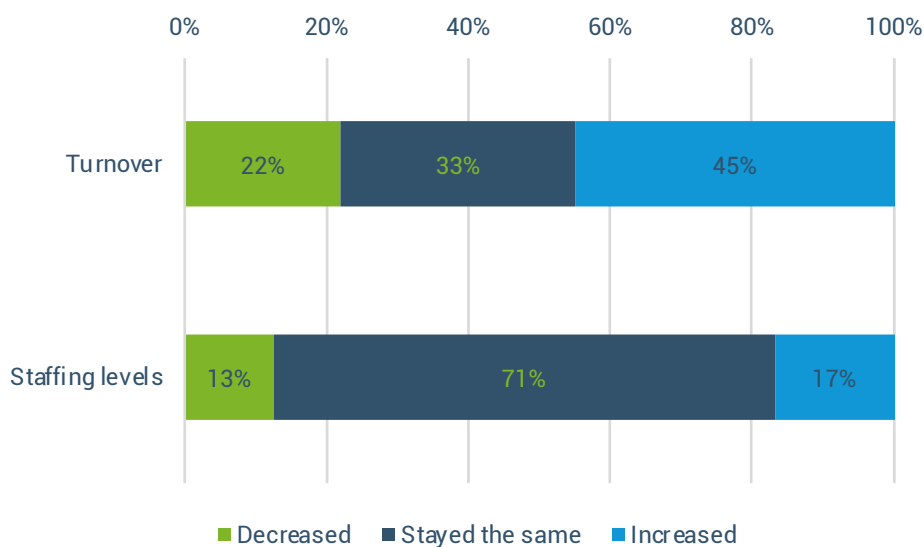
Figure 7: Turnover in the last 12 months (n = 83)



In terms of performance of turnover and staffing levels, of those businesses able to take a view, close to half (45%) reported an increased turnover in the last 12 months. Those businesses in operation for at least 10 years were more likely to have reported a decrease in turnover.

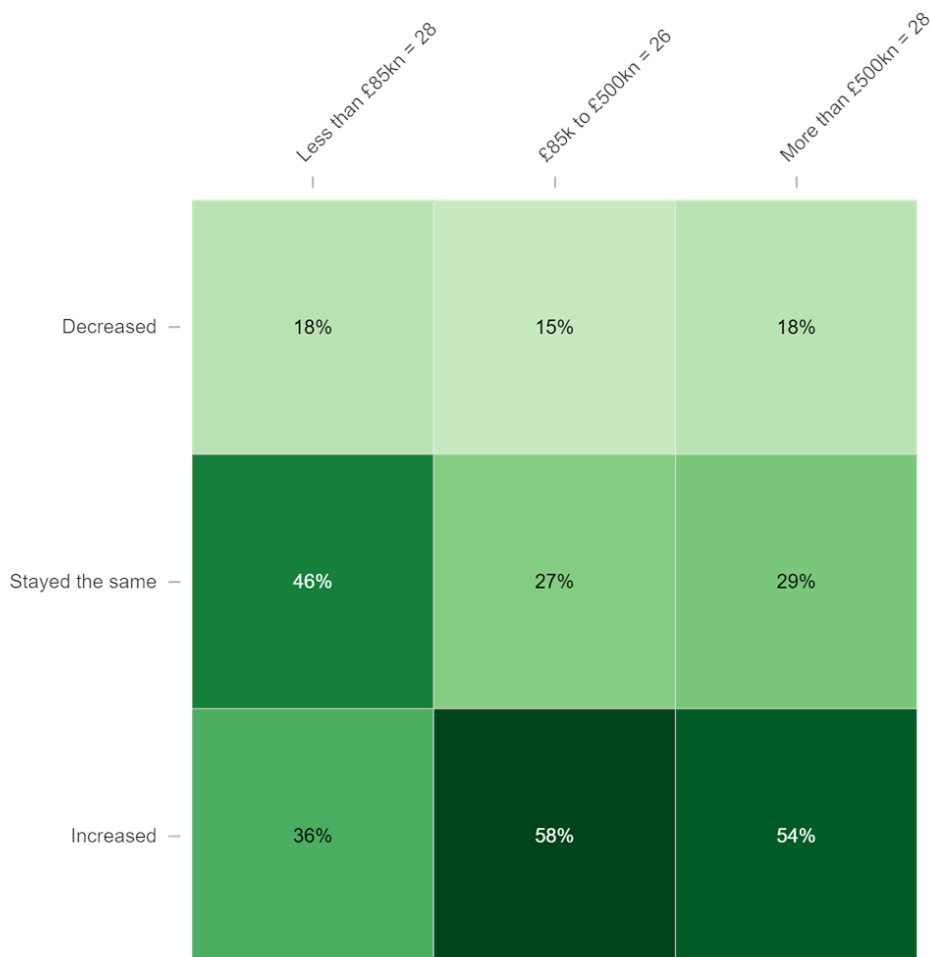
Around 7 in 10 of responding businesses indicated that their staffing levels have remained the same over the last 12 months. 32% of those reporting a fall in turnover had decreased staffing levels over the last year.

Figure 8: Change in turnover and staffing levels over last 12 months (n = 117)



The heatmap below highlights turnover performance at different levels. It shows that those with turnover above £85k were more likely to have experienced an increase over the last 12 months. Those turning over less than £85k were more likely to have seen it remain fairly stable.

Figure 9: Level of turnover by reported increase or decrease (n = 84)

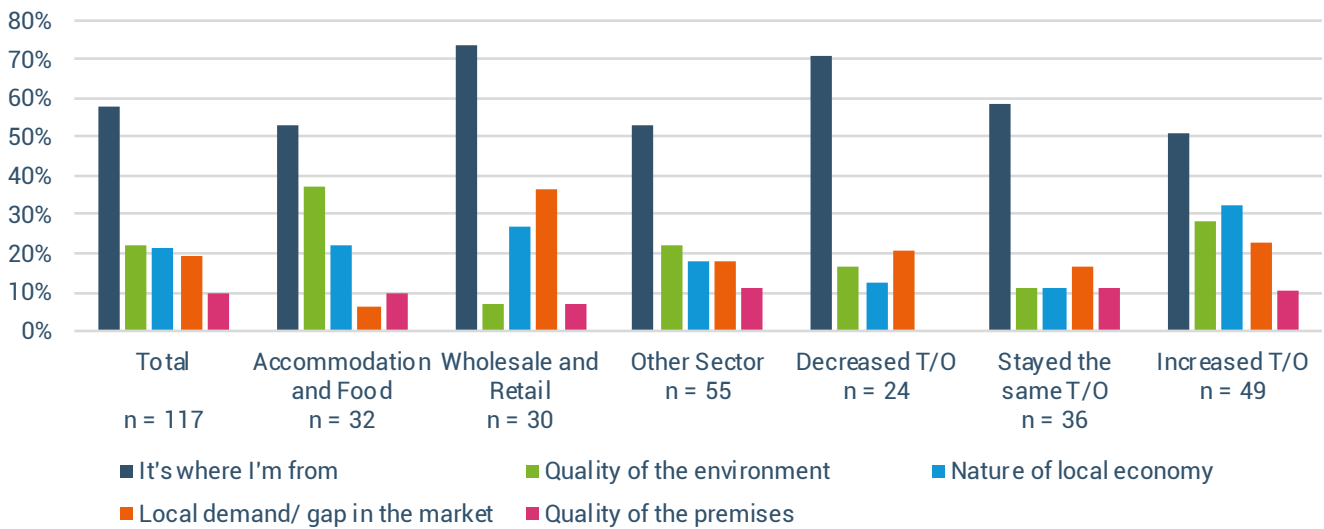


Operating in Ribble Valley

The most common reason given by respondents for operating in Ribble Valley is that it is where they are from (58%). Other popular reasons given were the quality of the environment, nature of the local economy, local demand or gap in the market and the quality of the premises available. When analysed by sector and turnover performance, a number of interesting findings emerge:

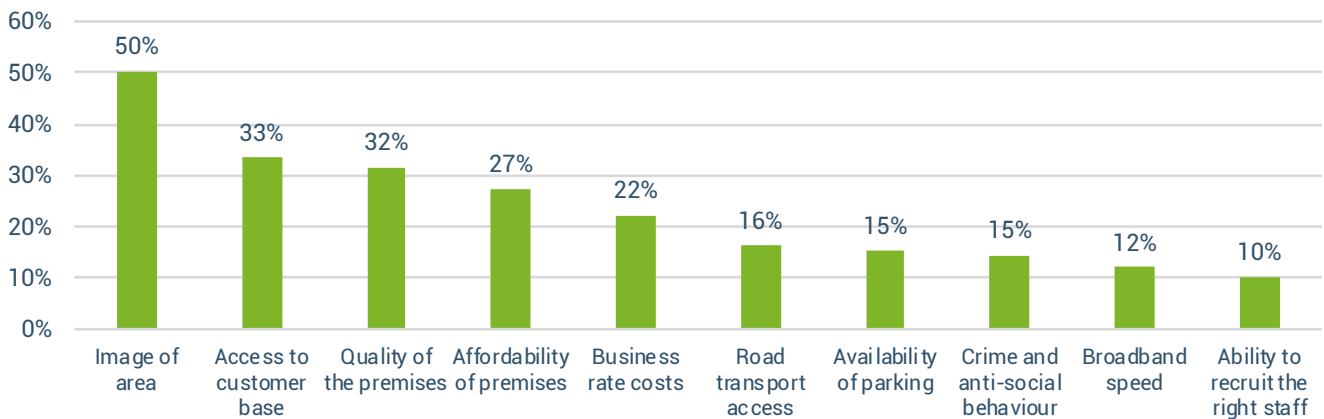
- Wholesale and retail businesses are more likely than other sectors to set up in Ribble Valley because it is where they are from
- There is a marked difference between accommodation/ food and wholesale/ retail when it comes to the quality of the environment
- Those businesses which have increased turnover in the last 12 months are more likely than others to be operating in Ribble Valley because of the nature of the local economy

Figure 10: Top 5 reasons for operating in Ribble Valley, by sector and performance (n = 117)



When it comes to what is most important to their business location, half of respondents identified the image of the area. Around a third selected access to a customer base and the quality of their premises. Cost also appears to be a factor with affordability of premises and business rate costs selected by 27% and 22% of respondents respectively.

Figure 11: Aspects considered most important to their business location (n = 117)



Analysing the most important aspects of business location by broad sector, the image of the area appears particularly important to those in accommodation and food services. Half of respondents in wholesale and retail identified access to customer base as important, considerably higher than other sectors.

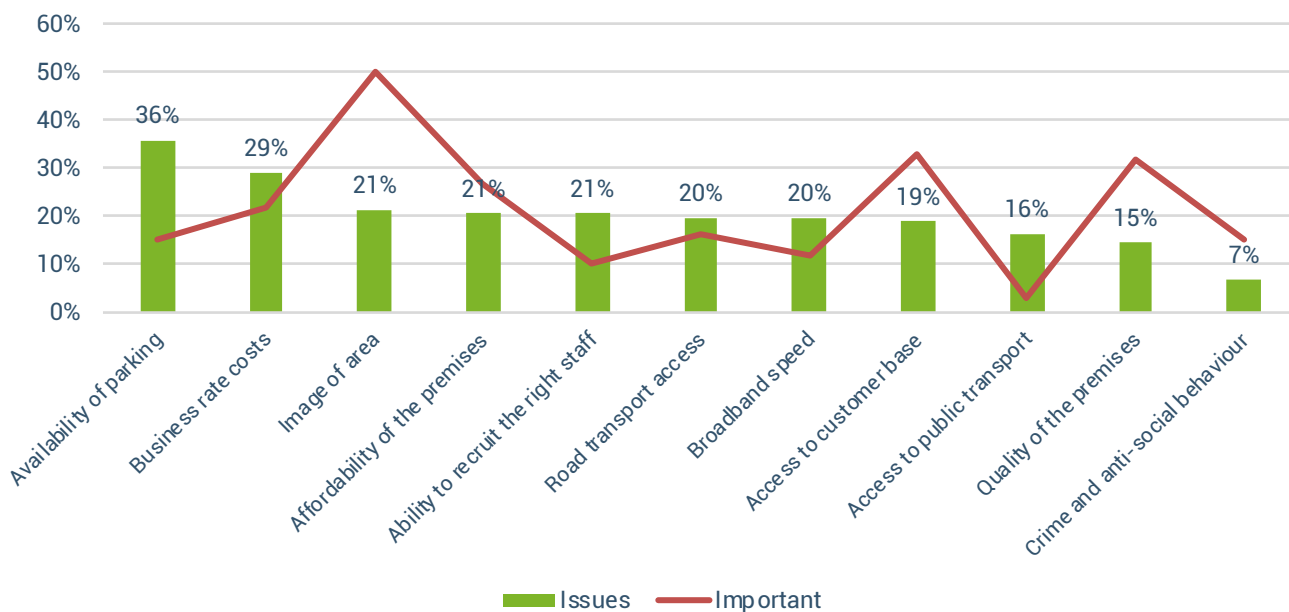
Figure 12: Most important aspects of business location by sector (n = 117)

	Accommodation and Food Servicesn = 32	Wholesale, Retail and Motor Vehiclesn = 30	Othersn = 55
Image of area –	62%	50%	44%
Access to customer base –	22%	50%	31%
Quality of the premises –	41%	43%	20%
Affordability of premises –	28%	27%	27%
Business rate costs –	25%	20%	22%
Road transport access –	16%	10%	20%
Availability of parking –	9%	17%	18%
Crime and anti-social behaviour –	19%	10%	15%
Broadband speed –	3%	7%	20%
Ability to recruit the right staff –	9%	17%	7%
Access to public transport –	0%	3%	4%

Businesses were also asked which aspects they considered to be the biggest issue in their current location. More than a third identified the availability of parking, followed by business rate costs. Those more likely to identify the availability of parking as an issue were businesses in the wholesale and retail sector (53%) and those that experienced a decrease in turnover during the last 12 months (54%).

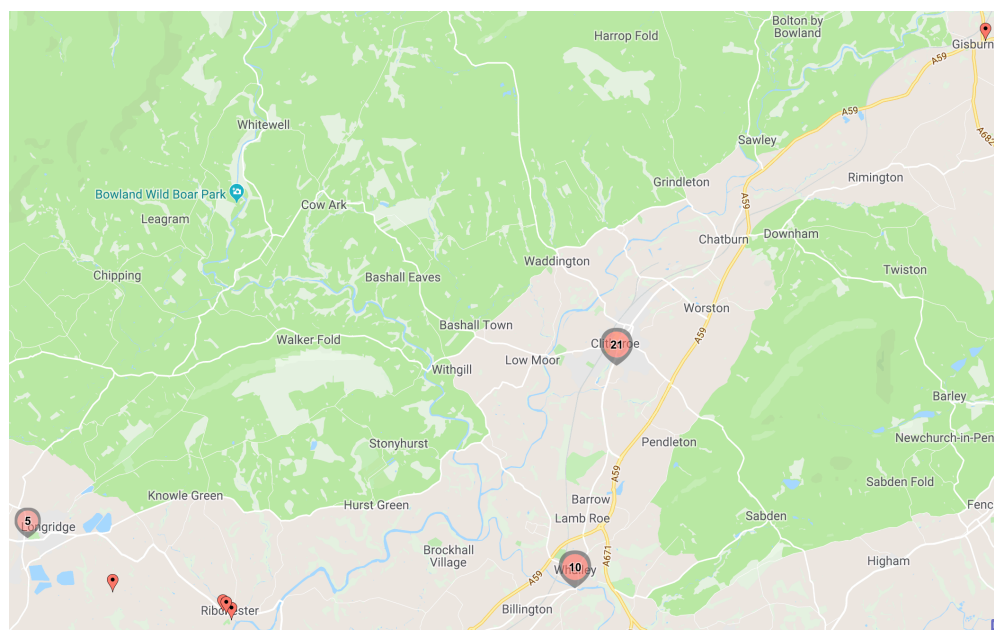
When the level of importance for each aspect is overlaid it is clear that the biggest issues are not necessarily as important to businesses in relation to other aspects.

Figure 13: Biggest issues with business location/ importance trendline (n = 117)



The majority of businesses identifying the availability of parking as an issue are based in either Clitheroe or Whalley.

Figure 14: Postcode mapping of businesses with parking availability issue (n = 41)



Business premises

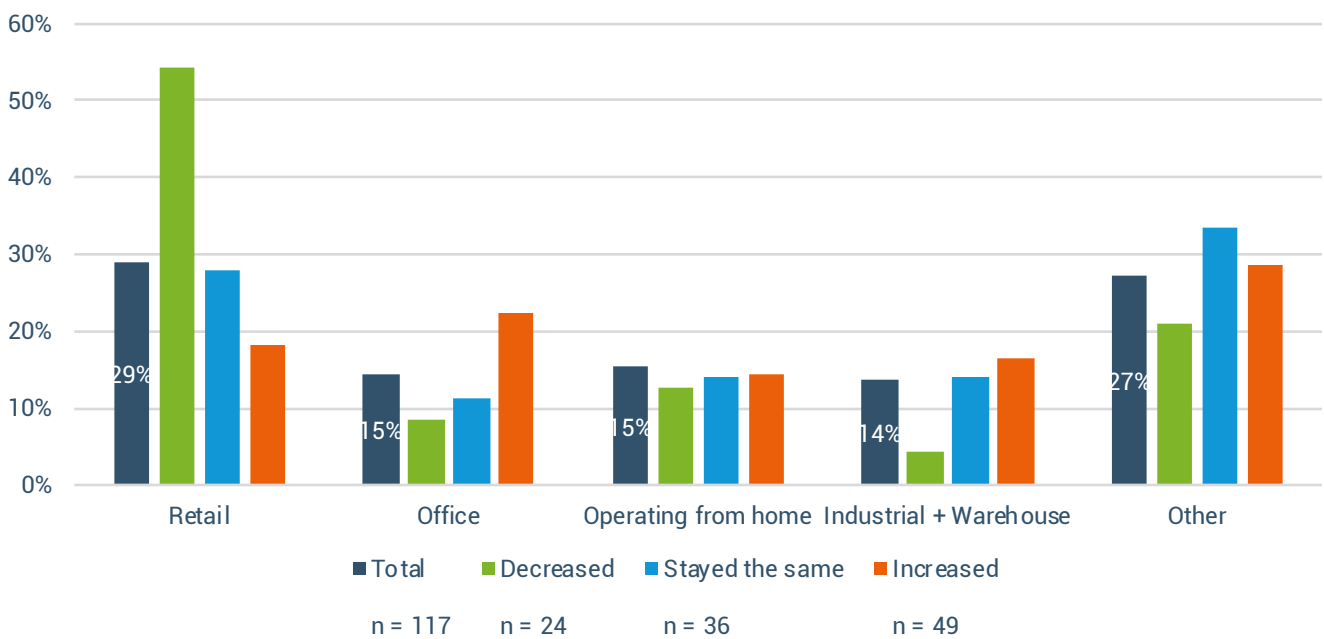
Current premises

The vast majority of responding businesses (91%) operate from one site in Ribble Valley. Those businesses operating for more than 20 years appear more likely to operate from multiple sites, although confidence levels with this sub-sample are low.

Around 3 in 10 respondents indicated that they operate from retail space. More than 50% of businesses experiencing a decrease in turnover in the last 12 months are in retail premises.

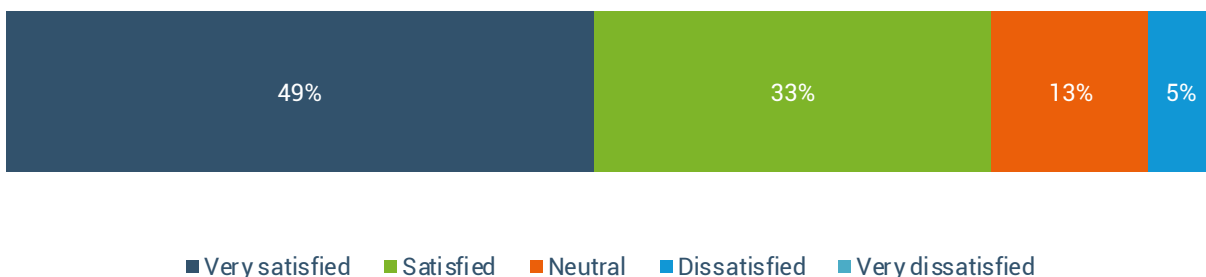
A significant proportion of businesses (27%) identified a business space within the 'other' category. This includes self-catering accommodation, community spaces and public houses.

Figure 15: Type of premises by turnover performance (n = 117)



Satisfaction with existing business premises is high with 82% of respondents indicating that they are very satisfied or satisfied. Just 5% are dissatisfied.

Figure 16: Satisfaction with business premises (n = 117)



When asked if they had any comments to make about their existing premises, respondents most commonly referred to the size of their space, the potential need to expand and availability (or lack of) suitable space. Comments included “fine, but too small with limited facilities on site”, “on the small size with no chance to expand” and “we have just moved to these premises which are a huge improvement on the previous offices; we have expanded and moved in the last year”.

A range of other comments were made about roads, parking and traffic such as “access roads are poorly maintained”, “parking is a major issue” and “premises are good but the state of the roads surrounding us is appalling and detrimental to visitors who come to stay”.

A number of respondents were positive about their premises, with comments including “highly convenient and cost effective” and “we have just moved into better and recently refurbished premises”.

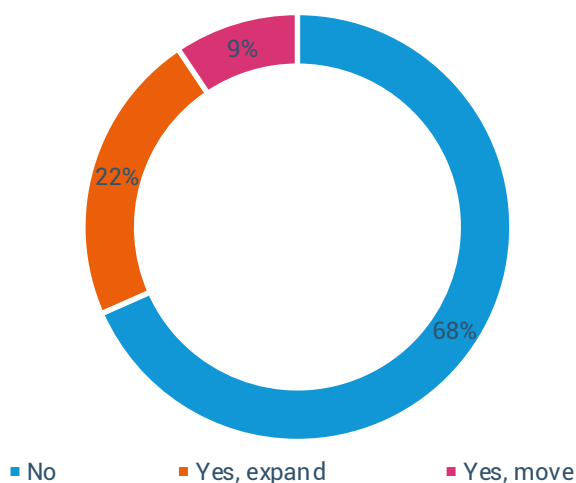
Figure 17: Coding for comments about existing premises (n = 38)

Coding category	Number of comments
Size/ expansion/ availability	11
Roads/ parking/ traffic	6
Other	6
Positive	6
Repairs and maintenance	4
Overheads/ costs	3
Size/ expansion	1
Planning	1

Current premises

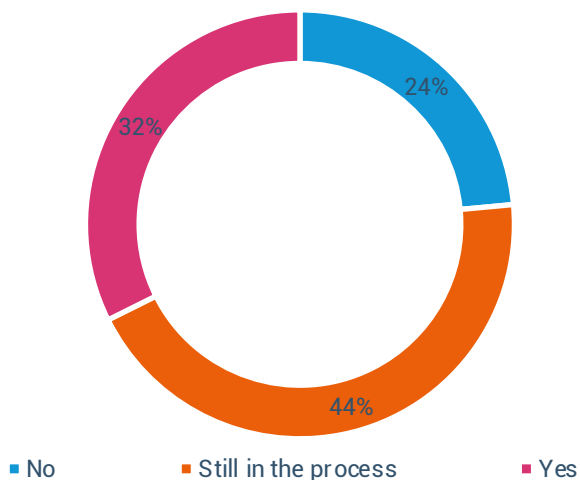
68% of respondents indicated that they have not tried to expand or move their business premises over the last 12 months. 22% have tried to expand their existing premises and 9% have tried to move.

Figure 18: Whether businesses have tried to expand or move in last 12 months (n = 117)



Of those who did try to expand or move in the last 12 months, not far off half are still in the process. Around a third indicated that the expansion or move was successful.

Figure 19: Whether the expansion or move was successful (n = 34)



When asked about any problems or issues they experienced when trying to expand or move, a range of comments were received.

Figure 20: Problems or issues when trying to expand or move premises (n = 21)

Comments about problems or issues experienced
Access to the premises
Business rates have doubled which has affected the bottom line lack of public transport affects staff recruitment so less workforce available
Could not find a big enough space but then the existing premises I rent were renovated, removing the need to move.
Expansion into internet sales
extra costs from Brexit - 20% more in costs of Italian ingredients
Haven't been given planning permission yet...
I have been able to increase the space available but the quality of the space is not as good. Peoples perception of where you are based even within the same postcode affects the rate of enquiries significantly.
lack of availability of a small entertainment venue of good quality
Lack of suitable premises in the correct location.
Lack of suitable premises locally has presented a problem. Our major projects are not local to the RV so traveling and car parking is an issue.
Limited availability of suitable premises and car parking has been an issue.
locating more suitable premises.
market has been affected
Move out of area
no properties available big enough
No room
Planning consent.
Planning objections eventually over ruled
Road access has been very frustrating regarding coach trips to the lower Hodder Valley

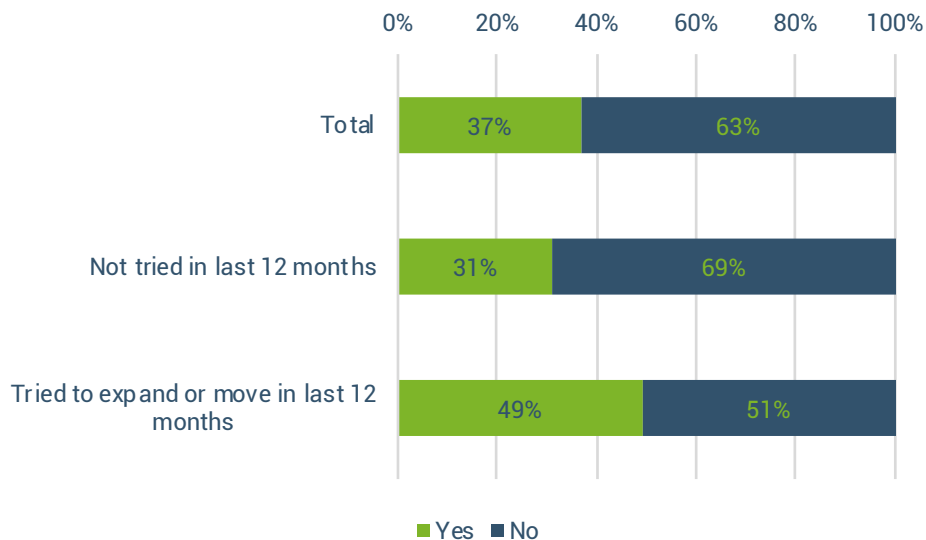
Some issues with planning.

It's a Grade 1 listed building necessitating support from the conservation officer .

Sometimes struggle getting planning permission eg. NFU Office took around 18 months and costs were high

37% of respondents indicated that their requirements for business premises are likely to change in the next 5 years. This is higher amongst those who tried to expand or move over the last 12 months.

Figure 21: Whether business premises requirements to change in next 5 years (n = 117)



Of those who think their requirements are likely to change over the next 5 years, a range of comments were received about specific needs. These included additional facilities to complement existing offers, increasing the size to scale up and meet customer demand, looking to move to find greater customer footfall and the need for more space to cater for additional staff.

A number of businesses also commented that it is likely they will retire or sell their business in the next 5 years.

A couple of comments suggested their future intentions would depend on the local infrastructure, offer and development.

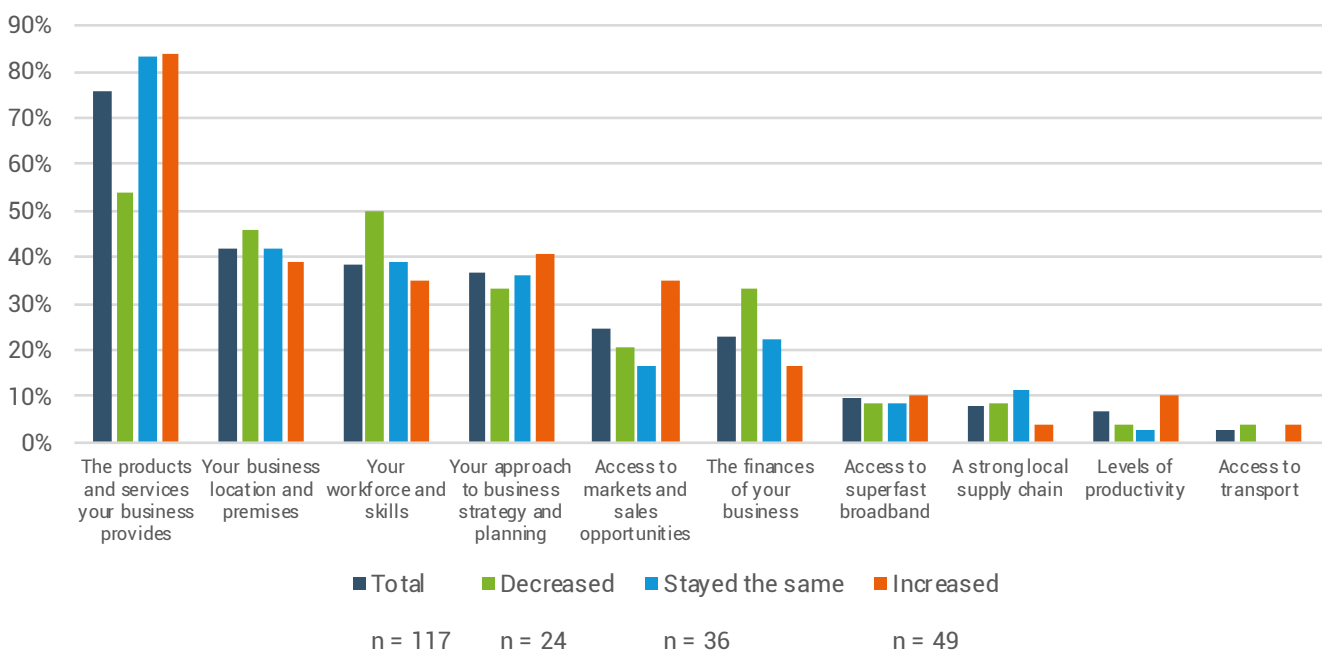
Drivers and barriers to growth

Businesses were asked what the three main drivers of growth are for them. The products and services they provide were considered the biggest driver, particularly for those businesses that had experienced steady or increased turnover in the last 12 months.

Those businesses that have seen a decrease in turnover were more likely to indicate that their workforce and skills is a driver of growth.

Those businesses with increased turnover were more likely to identify access to markets and sales opportunities as a driver.

Figure 22: Main drivers of business growth by turnover performance (n = 117)



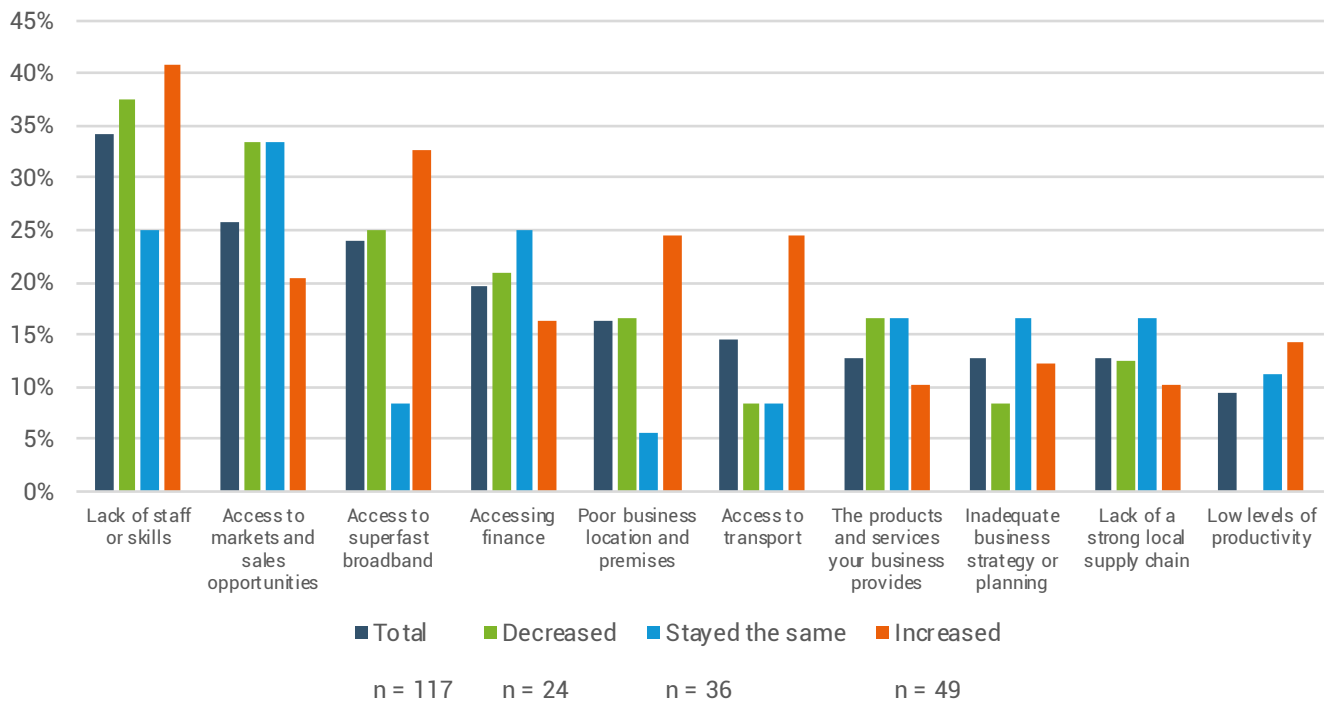
Businesses were also asked what the three main barriers of growth are for them. Lack of staff and skills is considered the biggest barrier, for businesses that have experienced a recent increase and decrease in turnover.

Access to markets and sales opportunities is considered more of a barrier to businesses that have not increased turnover during the last 12 months.

Those businesses with increased turnover were considerably more likely than others to identify access to superfast broadband as a barrier to growth. They were also more likely to identify poor business location and premises as well as access to transport.

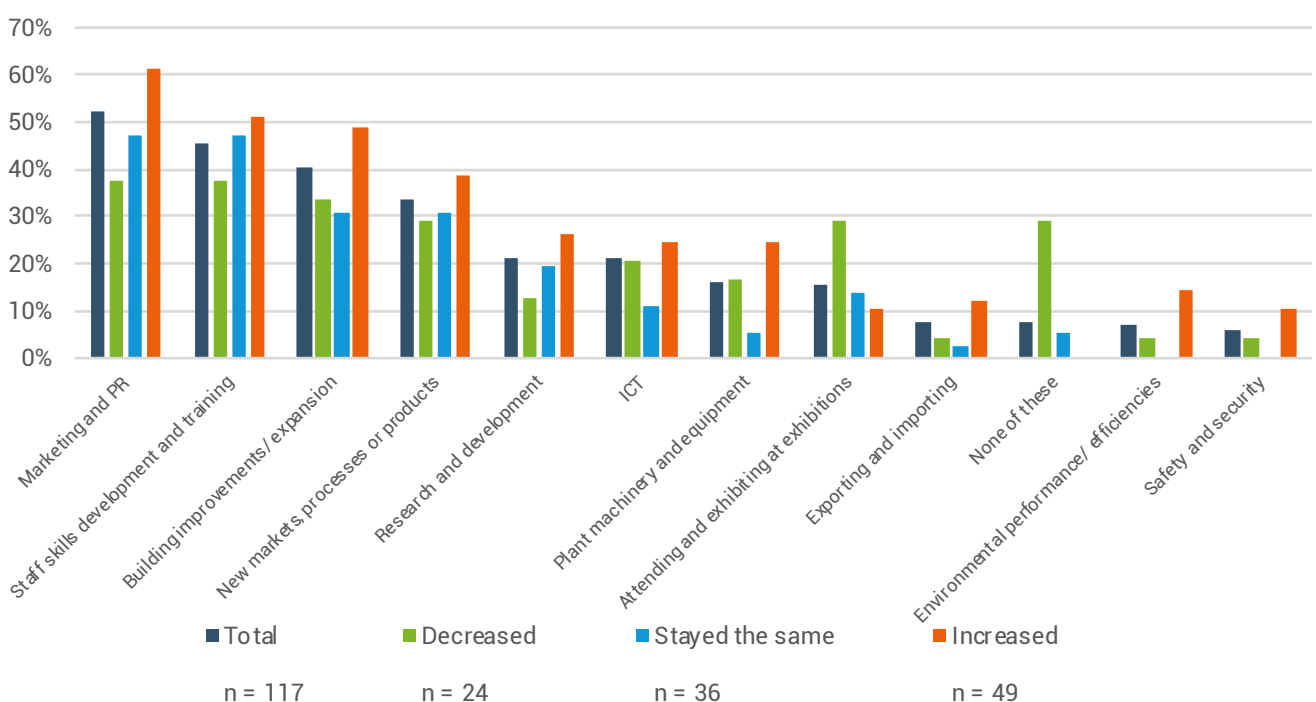
No businesses with a fall in turnover during the last 12 months identified low levels of productivity as a barrier to their growth.

Figure 23: Main barriers of business growth by turnover performance (n = 117)



In terms of planned investment for their business, respondents were most likely to indicate that they will be investing in marketing and PR. It is noticeable that the proportion of businesses identifying this gradually increases in line with previous turnover performance. This is a similar pattern for a number of investment areas. Those businesses that have seen a decrease in turnover over the last 12 months were more likely than others to suggest they will not be making any investments in their business during the next 2 years.

Figure 24: Areas of investment planned over next 2 years by turnover performance (n = 117)



When asked for any comments about the growth of their business, a wide range of comments were received. Amongst these, a number referred to parking, traffic and roads in Ribble Valley with examples including "our growth is severely hampered by the total lack of a shoppers car park" and "guests comment about the poor state of country roads, fearing damage to their vehicles".

Several comments focused on employing staff and some of the challenges associated with this, including "access to quality staff is the main barrier along with the red tape and paperwork that goes with employing them" and "finding it hard to get suitable staff / trained operatives without paying a fortune".

Some took the opportunity to provide an insight into the growth of their business, with comments such as "it has been steady over the past few years but we could always do with it being better" and "the business has grown dramatically since 2010 and we have won numerous awards". A couple of businesses suggested that growth is not the key driver for them and it is "not as important as sustainability".

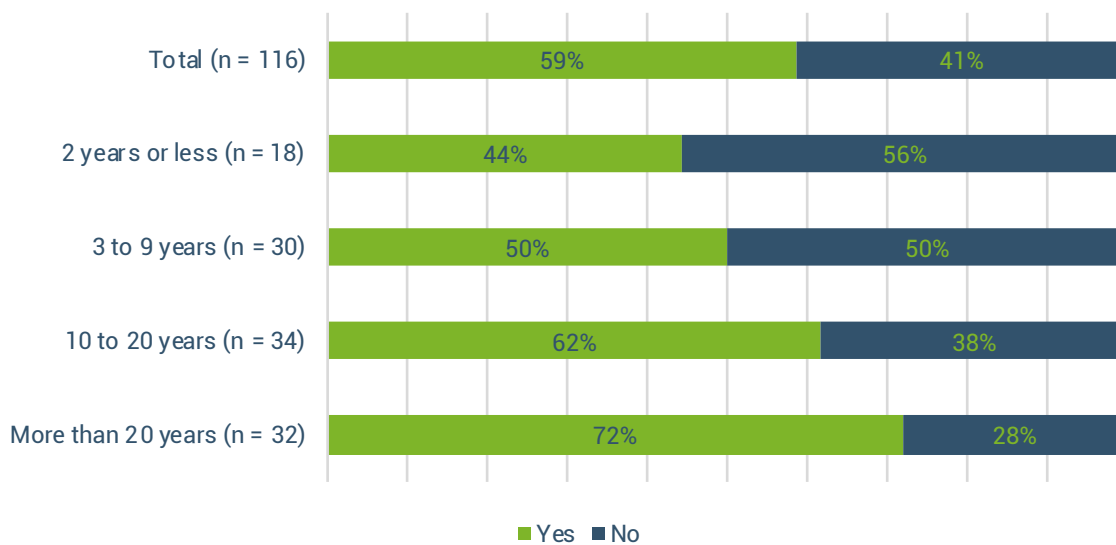
There were mixed comments about marketing and identity of Ribble Valley and Bowland, with comments ranging from "it is hampered by Bowland having an unrecognised identity" to "we are pleased with the continuing promotion of the Ribble Valley, Forest of Bowland and Pendle Hill areas".

Recruitment and skills

Around three in five of responding businesses indicated that they have tried to recruit new staff in the last 2 years. The more established the business, the more likely they were to have gone out to recruit. 72% of businesses operating for more than 20 years have tried to recruit new staff in the last 2 years.

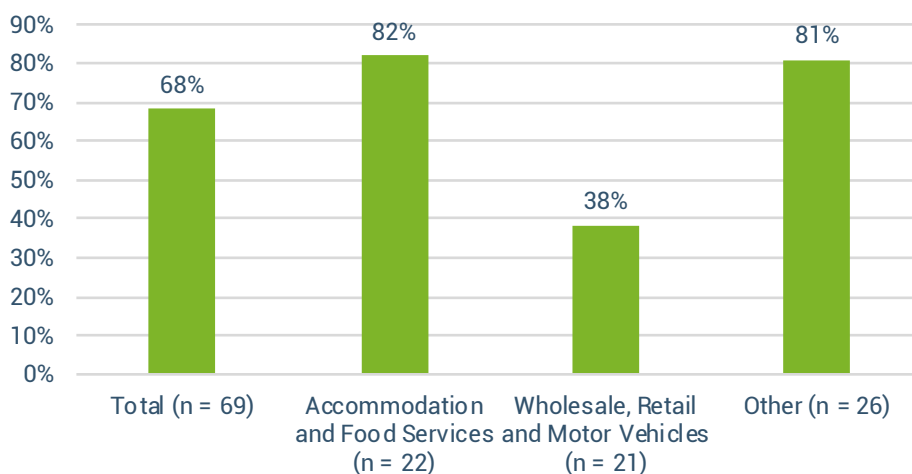
Those businesses that have experienced a decrease in turnover appear equally likely to have tried recruiting as those with an increased turnover.

Figure 25: Have they tried to recruit in last 2 years by age of business (n = 116)



Of the businesses that have tried to recruit in the last 2 years, around two thirds (68%) indicate that they have experienced difficulties. Those in the retail and wholesale sector appear less likely to have had difficulties.

Figure 26: Difficulties recruiting new staff by broad sector (n = 69)



Of those businesses that have experienced difficulties, when asked to explain the issues they have faced the most common problem has been attracting the right quality of candidate with comments including "difficulties finding quality staff" and "unbelievably difficult to find qualified staff, especially qualified and reliable ones".

A number of businesses identified specific skills gaps relating to their area of work, including “not a large pool of engineers in the area” and “not enough drivers coming into the job”. Some businesses commented on the challenges their sector faces, notably those in the hospitality industry with comments including “people don’t want to work in the hospitality industry” and “the hospitality industry in general is not viewed as a career in the UK”.

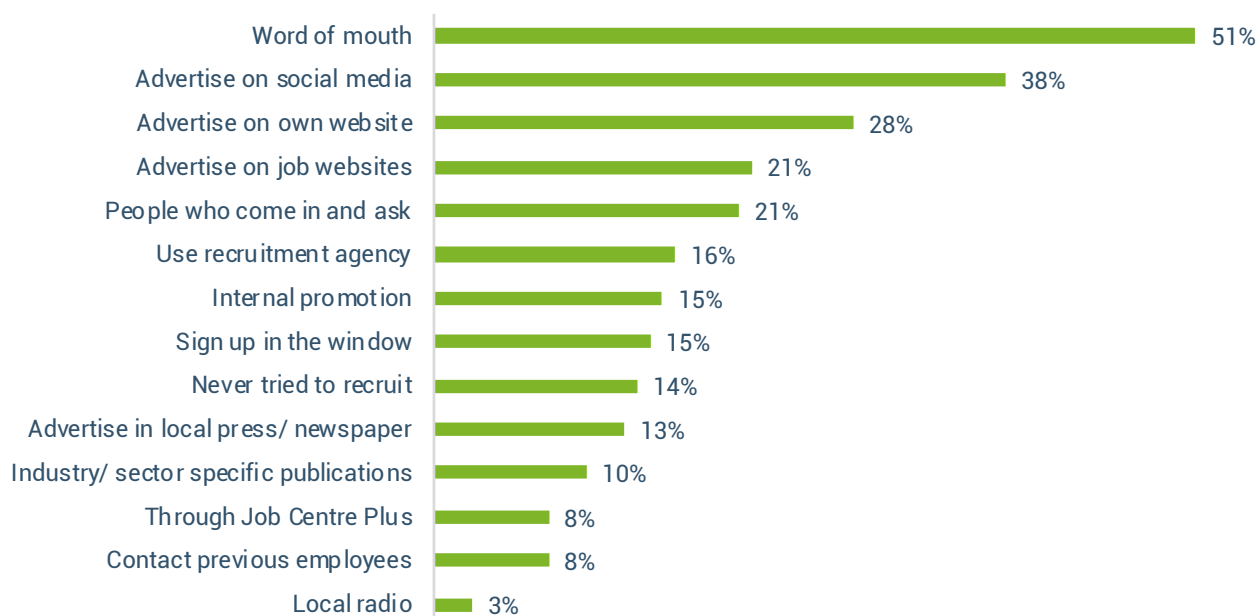
Several businesses identified issues attracting suitable candidates to the local area, with the location, transport and accommodation considered barriers. Comments included “poor public transport means it’s difficult to recruit from neighbouring towns” and “no one wants to come to work in the village as the local accommodation costs are high”.

Figure 27: Difficulties experienced by businesses when recruiting (n = 40)

Coding category	Comments
Quality	9
Specific skill gap	6
Sector difficulties	5
Location, transport, accommodation barriers	5
Other	4
Availability	3
General difficulties	3
Colleges/ apprenticeships	3
Demand	2

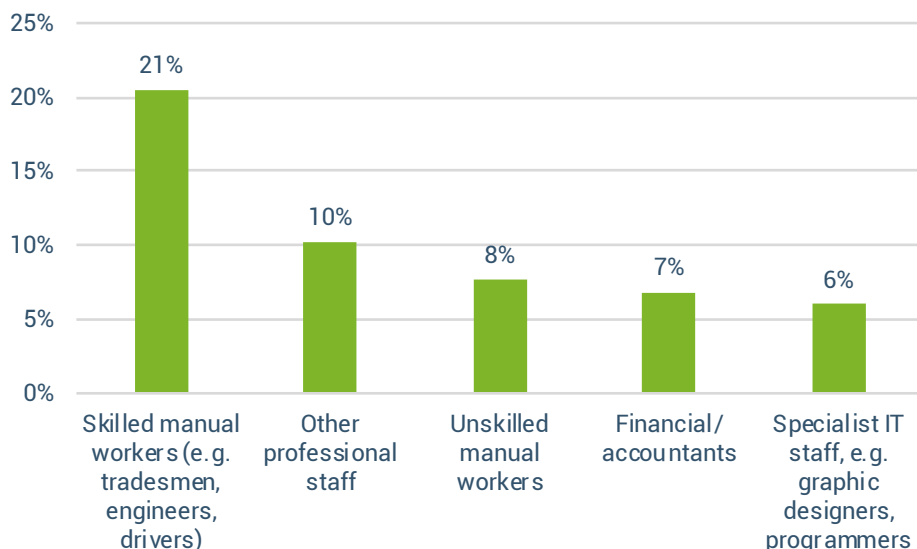
Half of businesses responding to the survey indicated that they recruit new staff through word of mouth. This is highest amongst the most established businesses operating for over 20 years. Advertising through social media also appears to be a popular approach, particularly in the accommodation and food sector.

Figure 28: How businesses advertise for new staff (n = 117)



When asked what particular skills or roles have been difficult to recruit to, skilled manual workers such as engineers and drivers was the most common selection. A range of professional skills like accountancy and IT also appear to be proving difficult to recruit to, although not to the same extent as skilled manual workers.

Figure 29: Top 5 skills or roles proving difficult to recruit to (n = 117)

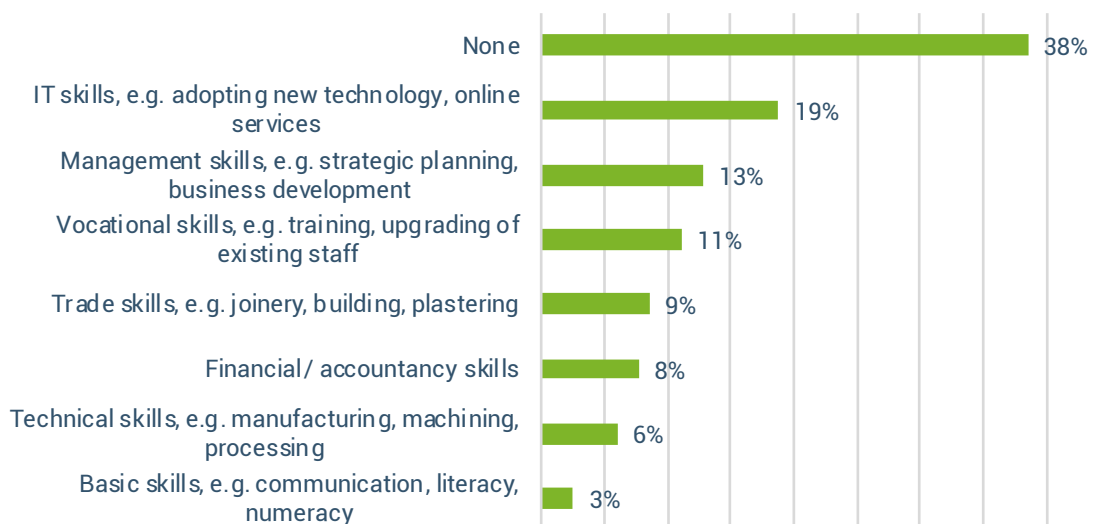


Around 2 in 5 of respondents indicated that there are no skills gaps within their business. This rises to half of those businesses that have experienced a decrease in turnover over the last 12 months.

Of the skill gaps identified, IT and the ability to adopt new technologies appears to be the biggest gap, particularly those businesses that have been operating for more than 20 years.

Around a quarter of businesses that have increased turnover in the last 12 months identified management skills as a gap in their business.

Figure 30: Skills gaps within the business (n = 117)



Respondents were asked if there were any issues that cause problems to their business with regards to staff or business travel. Of the 27 comments received, public transport appears to be the key issue. Comments include "no public transport in the evenings so staff can't travel back to Burnley, Blackburn and Clitheroe" and "the reduction in public transport is not good for workers".

A range of other comments were made about traffic and parking, including "parking is a huge issue for us" and "A59 delays, accidents, tractors".

Figure 31: Issues regarding staff or business travel (n = 27)

Coding category	Comments
Public transport	12
Traffic	4
Other	4
Parking	4
Accommodation/ affordable housing	3
Road conditions	3

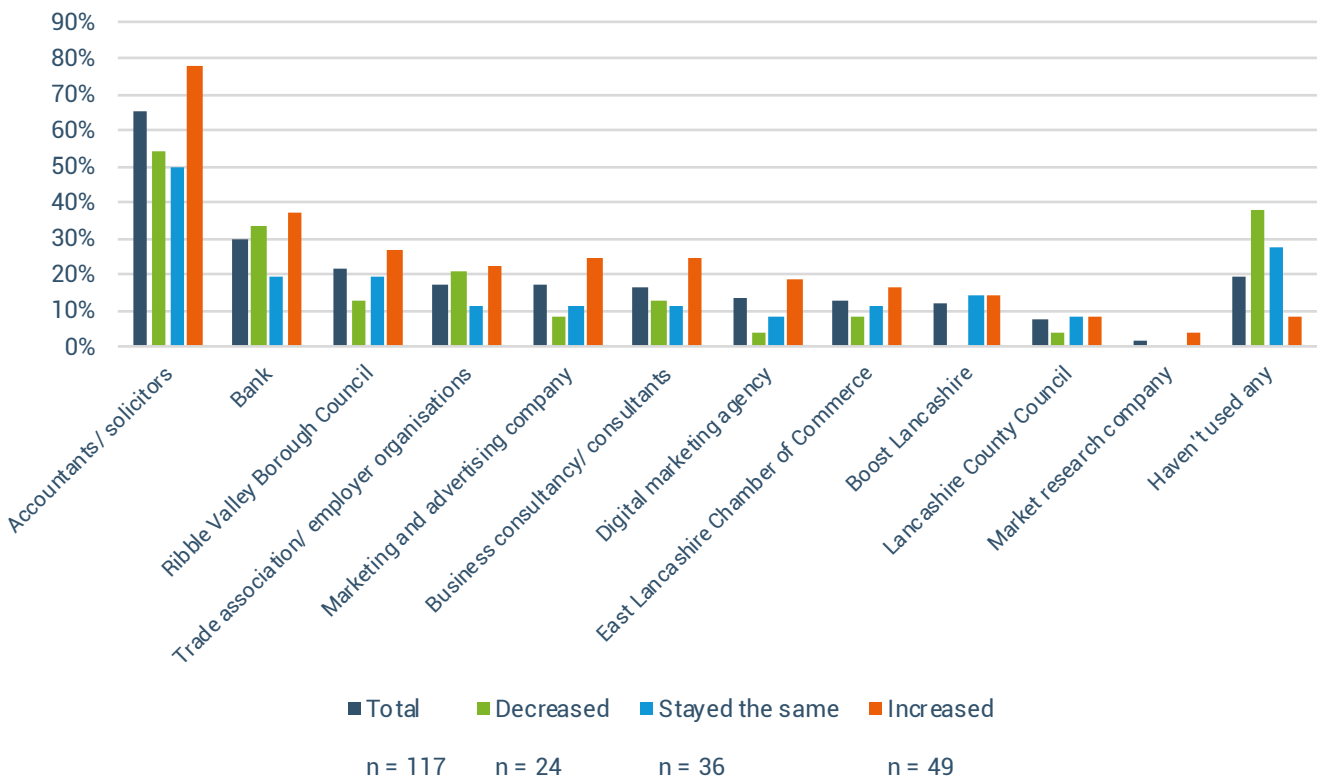
Business support

Respondents were asked if they have accessed any information or advice for their business over the last 2 years. More than 3 in 5 have used an accountant or solicitor for information and advice and around 3 in 10 have accessed it through a bank. Around 1 in 5 have contacted Ribble Valley Borough Council for advice and information.

Those businesses with an increased turnover during the last 12 months have consistently accessed information and advice from organisations more than those whose turnover decreased.

38% of businesses that experienced a fall in turnover had not accessed any information or advice over the last 2 years, compared to 8% of businesses with an increased turnover.

Figure 32: How businesses have accessed information and advice over the last 2 years by turnover performance (n = 117)



When asked if they had found any gaps or support they were unable to access, the main comments related to grants and funding, particularly for small businesses. Other comments were varied, from wider support expected from district and county councils to awareness of service available to businesses in the local area.

Finally, businesses were asked if there are any support services they are likely to look for in the future. 2 in 5 are likely to seek support in improving their online and digital presence, with this highest amongst businesses under the age of 2 and those businesses that have experienced an increase in turnover.

Close to a third of respondents identified access to finance, including grants and subsidies, as an area of support they would be looking at in the next 2 years.

Those businesses that have recently experienced an increase in turnover are noticeably more likely than others to be looking at increasing sales through marketing and seeking business growth advice over the next 2 years.

Figure 33: Support or advice services businesses are likely to look for in next 2 years (n = 117)

