

The Business Ownership Index 2026

Britain's changing relationship with work, careers, entrepreneurship

 BusinessesForSale.com



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Executive summary – by Andrew Markou, CEO

Britain is undergoing a profound shift in its relationship with work.

Traditional career paths are becoming less certain, while changing technology and economic pressures are causing people to think differently about how they earn, progress and plan for the future. Increasingly, many of us are questioning whether traditional employment alone can provide the long-term security it once promised.

Against this backdrop, growing numbers are looking beyond conventional employment and towards entrepreneurship and business ownership.

The Business Ownership Index set out to understand this shift.

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of UK adults about their attitudes towards work, careers, entrepreneurship and business ownership.

The findings point to a country rethinking where long-term security comes from and becoming far more entrepreneurial than many of us realise.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is just how broad that ambition has become. It is no longer the preserve of experienced founders or business owners.

Women are emerging as one of the strongest drivers of entrepreneurial ambition. And more of us, particularly younger people, are already creating our own opportunities through side hustles, freelance work and new business ventures to supplement income.

Increasingly, people want greater control over their future rather than relying solely on an employer to provide it.

Yet the findings also reveal a significant disconnect. While entrepreneurial ambition is growing, understanding of how to achieve it has not kept pace.

Too many people still believe that starting a business is the only route to ownership. At the same time, relatively few understand that buying an established business or franchise can provide a more accessible, proven, and lower-risk path.

Awareness, confidence, and access to finance remain among the biggest barriers to action.

The Business Ownership Index shows that Britain stands at an important crossroads. The challenge now is to remove the barriers that prevent people from turning entrepreneurial ambition into business ownership.

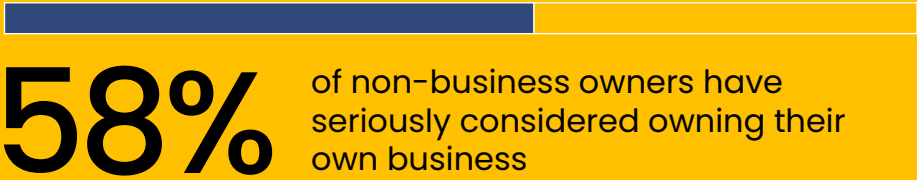
Andrew Markou, CEO, BusinessesForSale.com



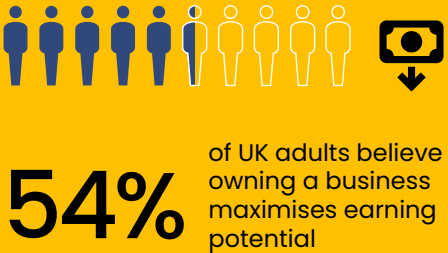
58%

of Britons have seriously considered owning their own business, and 70% see business ownership as a path to long-term financial independence

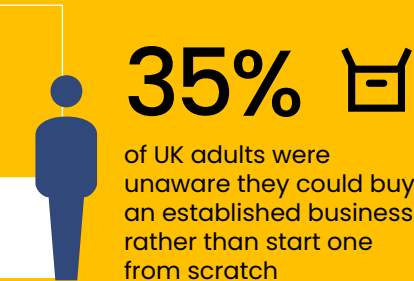
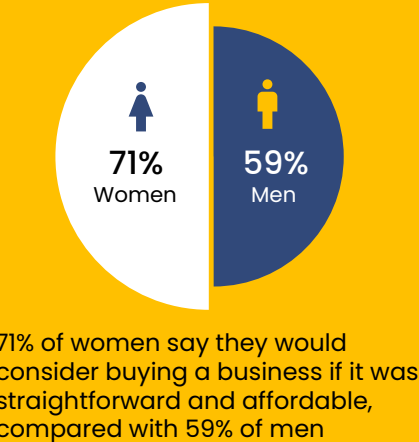
Key findings



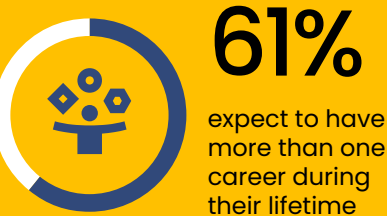
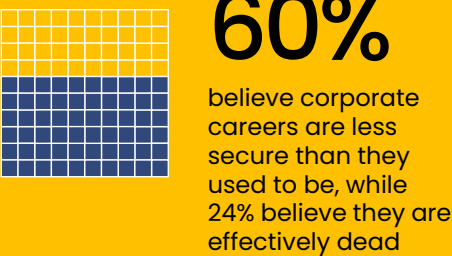
...on business ownership



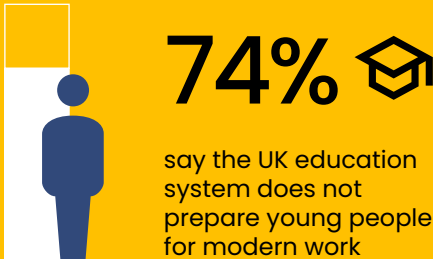
...on buying a business



...on corporate careers



...on support for businesses



The changing world of work



For decades, a successful working life followed a familiar path: join a company, work hard, progress steadily and retire with financial security.

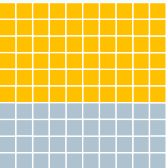
Today's workforce is far less certain about this approach.

Our research suggests confidence in traditional careers is weakening across multiple fronts. Progression feels less predictable, long-term financial security less certain, and many people now expect to change direction several times during their working lives.



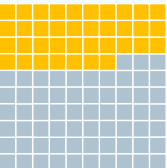
A traditional career model under pressure

Career confidence



60%

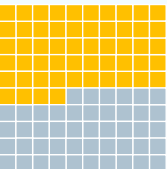
believe corporate careers are less secure than they used to be, while 24% believe they are effectively dead



Only

37%

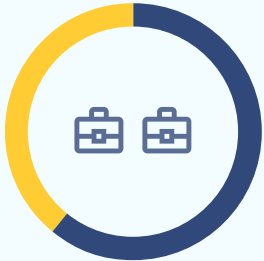
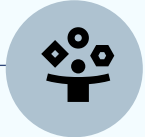
believe a traditional corporate career will provide long-term financial security



54%

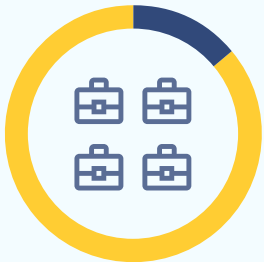
believe the traditional career ladder is outdated

A changing working life



61%

expect to have more than one career during their lifetime



14%

expect to have four or more careers

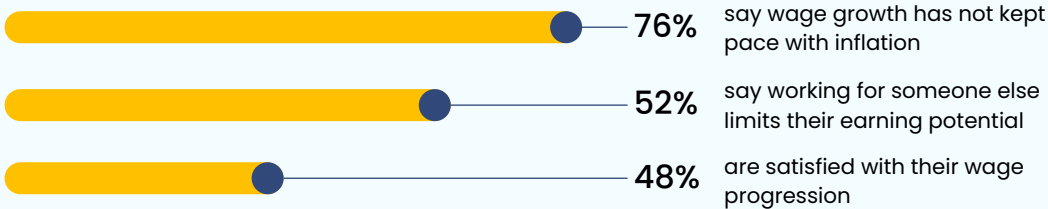
Financial rewards of employment are under scrutiny

The economics of employment are less compelling than they once were, and many people say employment no longer offers financial certainty.

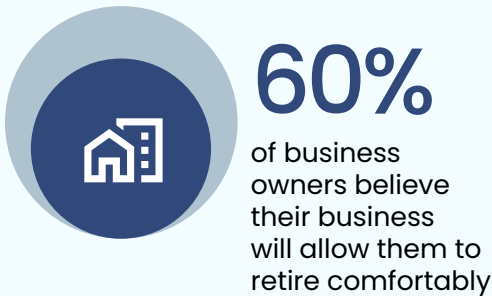
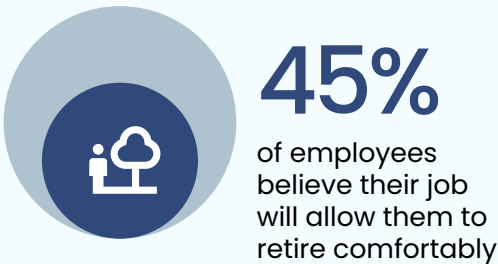
Wage growth has struggled to keep pace with rising living costs, career progression feels uneven, and confidence about retirement varies sharply depending on income, seniority and occupation.



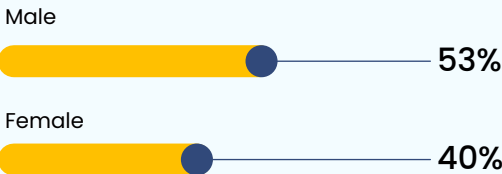
A weak financial case for employment



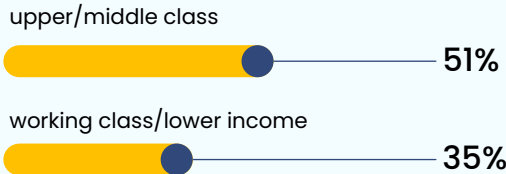
Do people think their job or business will allow them to retire comfortably?



By gender



By social grade



Artificial intelligence is driving significant change

Technology has always transformed work. But AI is reshaping expectations about future employment more quickly than previous innovations.

Many people now expect jobs, careers and even entire industries to change dramatically over the coming decade.

AI is reshaping the future of work

Concerns



72%

believe AI and automation will threaten many jobs



63%

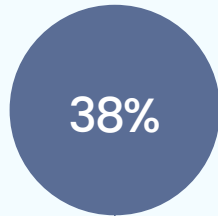
believe AI is already taking jobs from young people



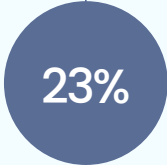
50%

believe AI will significantly replace human work within 5–10 years

What happens next?



expect more people to have multiple jobs simultaneously



expect more people to own businesses



believe traditional employment will become obsolete



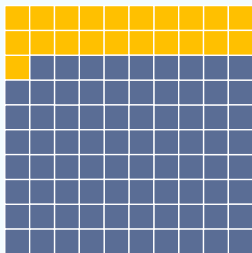
believe little will change



Practical careers have greater appeal

As confidence in traditional office-based careers weakens, many are turning their attention to skilled trades and other non-corporate professions for greater long-term security.

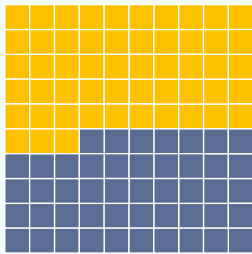
Which careers offer the safest long-term future?



79%



believe skilled trades such as electricians, plumbers and builders offer a safer long-term career than office jobs



47%



believe non-corporate careers such as retail, hospitality, catering and teaching offer a safer long-term future than office-based employment

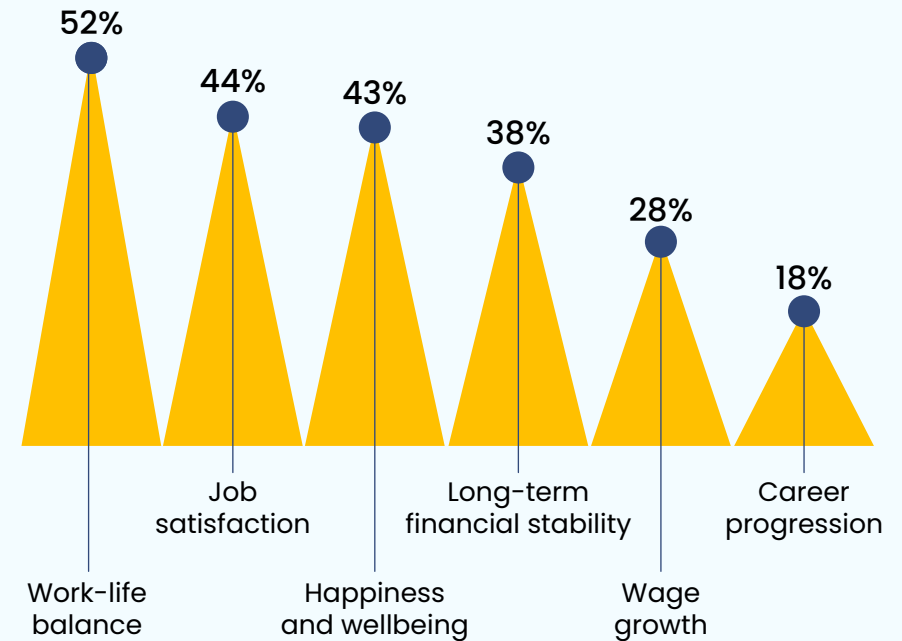


People's priorities are changing

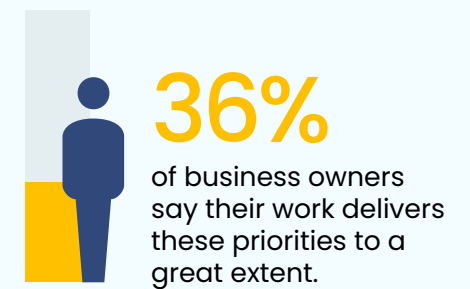
Instead of salary or promotions, people are placing greater value on work-life balance, job satisfaction and wellbeing.

Yet for many, there remains a gap between what they want from work and what their current employment delivers. Business owners are far more likely to feel their work delivers these priorities to a greater extent.

What people want from work



Is work delivering?



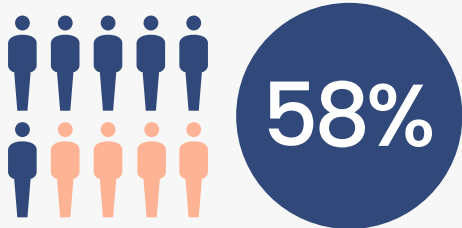
The ownership opportunity



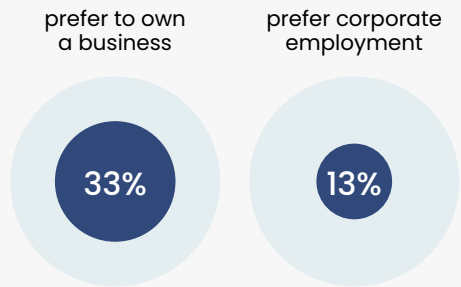
People see business ownership as a route to greater freedom, independence, and control over their working lives. Crucially, this isn't just the view of aspiring entrepreneurs.

Those who already own businesses are even more likely to see ownership as the ultimate expression of freedom, suggesting the reality often lives up to the expectation.

People who agree business ownership is the ultimate freedom



of people have considered business ownership, suggesting a clear desire for entrepreneurship. 13% say they have considered it but couldn't do it, indicating an uncertainty about the path to ownership.



If income were broadly similar, 33% would prefer to own a business, compared with 13% preferring corporate employment.

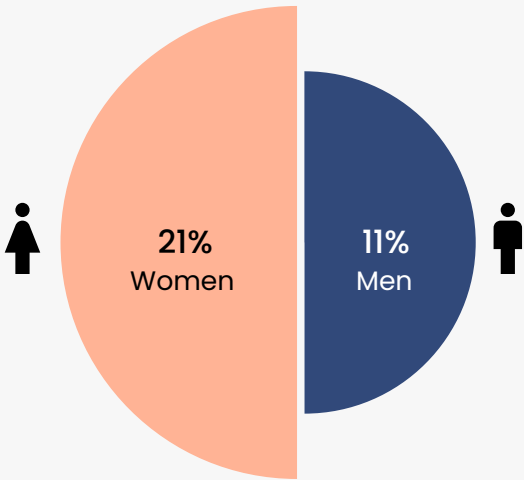
Women and younger people driving entrepreneurial ambition

Women are becoming more entrepreneurial. They're twice as likely as men to dream of owning their own business, and 66% of all respondents agree there has been a rise in female entrepreneurs over the last few years.

Nearly all the women who own their business feel in control and like they're progressing (92%), compared to just 69% of men.

Britain's youngest workers are leading the entrepreneurial shift. A third of 18-24-year-olds dream of owning a business, and 83% have considered business ownership. Young people are more likely to believe business ownership offers a safer long-term option than traditional office jobs.

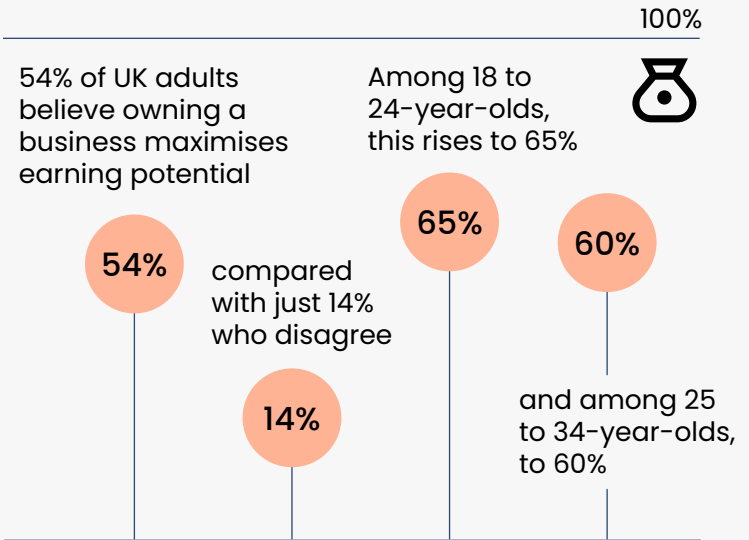
women are almost twice as likely as men to dream of owning a business





The financial case for ownership

Three quarters of respondents believe wage growth has not kept up with inflation. More than half of UK adults and 68% of business owners believe owning a business maximises earning potential.

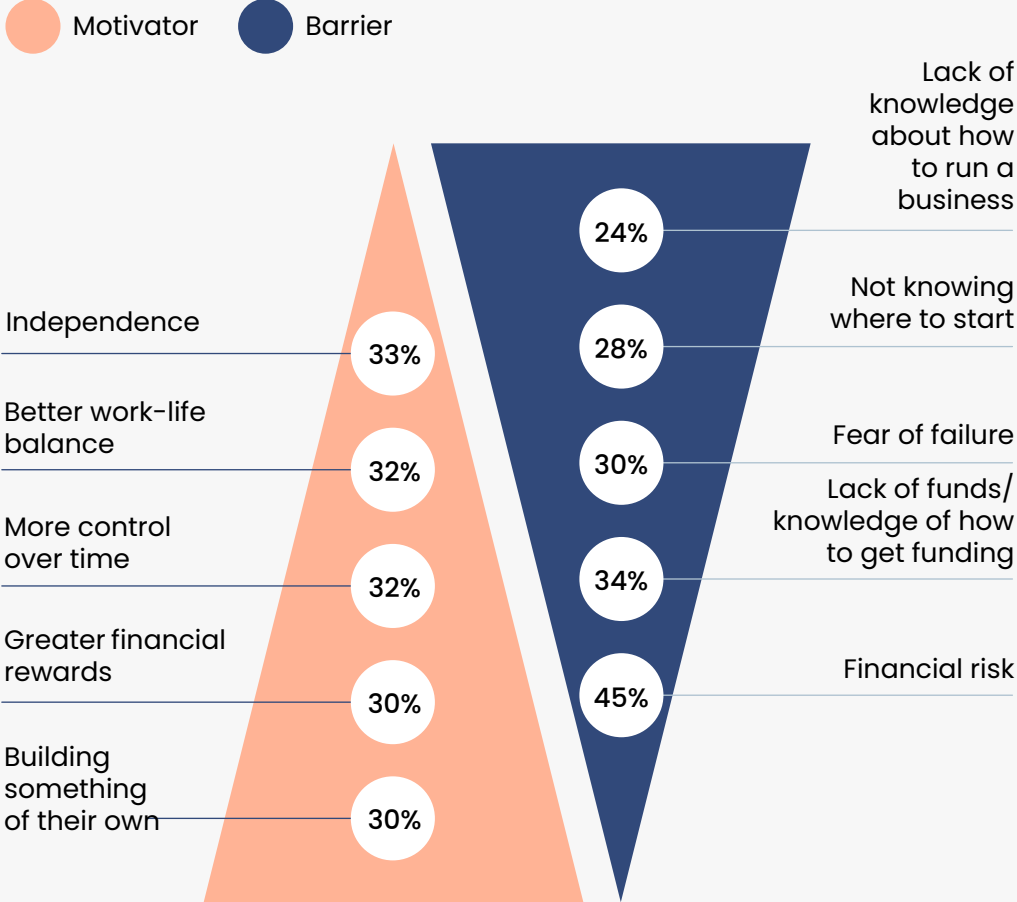


70% believe buying a business is a realistic path to long-term financial independence, although only 47% believe entrepreneurship is available to everyone.

Motivations and barriers to business ownership

Respondents highlighted their top motivators for business ownership. But if entrepreneurship is thriving, why aren't more people becoming business owners? The barriers centre on money and knowledge, rather than motivation.

Only **39%** of respondents believe that successive governments have supported business ownership well through loans, grants, lower business rates and so on. **54%** think entrepreneurship is not well supported in the UK, with insufficient support for people wanting to run their own businesses.



The route to entrepreneurship

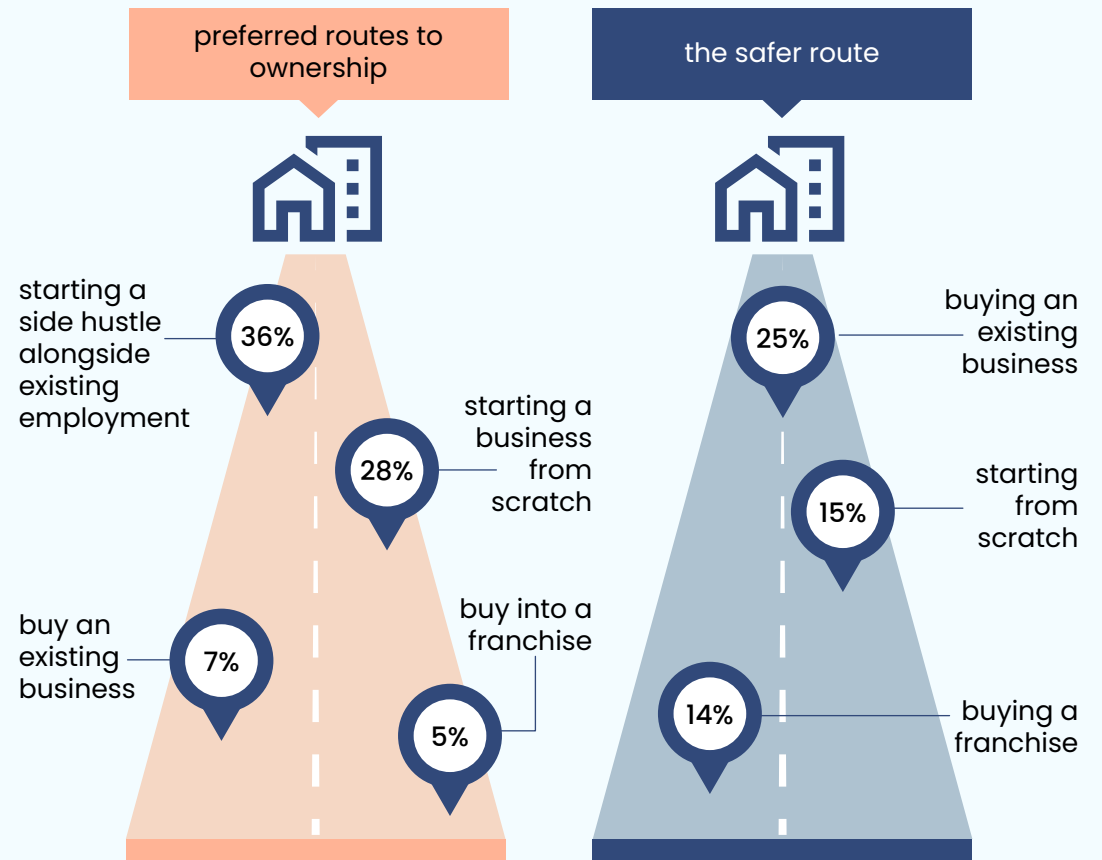


Britain has long celebrated the startup founder. When people imagine becoming a business owner, they picture starting from scratch.

Buying an established business or franchise can offer a lower-risk route into business ownership, but it remains one of the least-understood paths to entrepreneurship.



The routes to business ownership

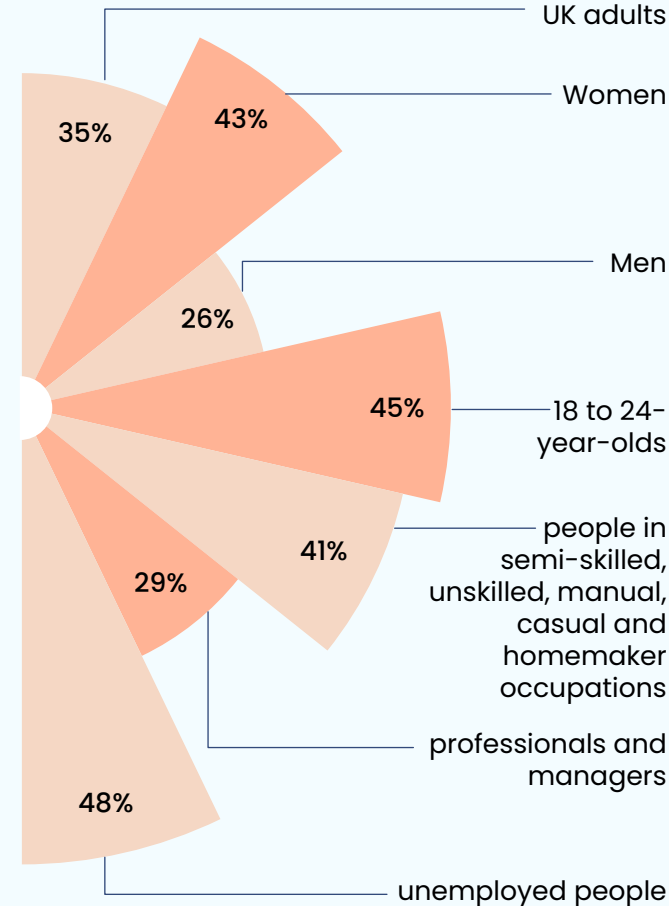


These graphics demonstrate an important point: the preference for starting from scratch is driven by unfamiliarity with the alternatives, not by a belief that it is safer or better.

The awareness gap

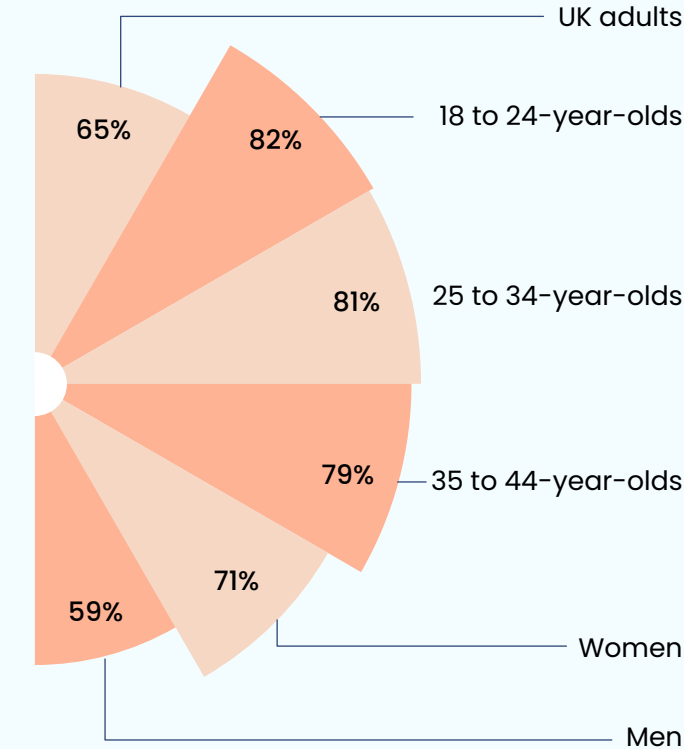
Less than half of respondents understood that buying a business is a viable route to ownership.

% of people who were unaware it is possible to buy an established business rather than start one



Awareness changes attitudes. Once people understood they could buy an existing business, many became open to the idea, particularly if the process is straightforward and affordable.

% of people who would consider buying a business if it were straightforward and affordable



70%
of UK adults believe buying a business is a realistic path to long-term financial independence, but 56% of those say it is only possible with the right guidance.

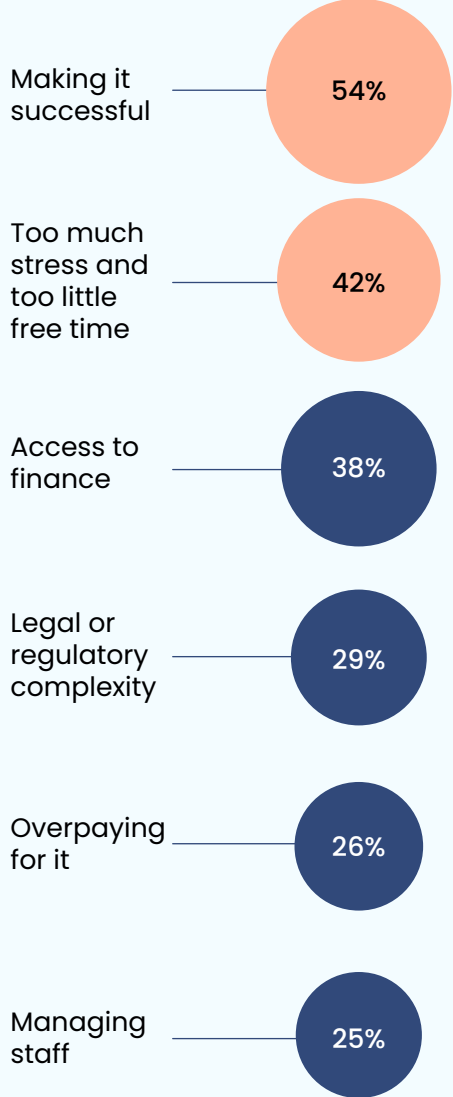
Concerns about buying a business

Many people worry about making a business successful. But buying an established business with proven customers, revenue and cash flow can make entrepreneurship a far less daunting prospect than starting from scratch.

Concerns about overpaying and legal complexity highlight the need for better advice and support.



People’s concerns about buying a business



Generations let down



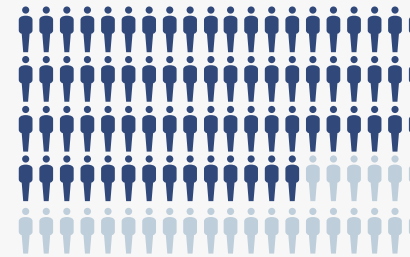
The world of work is changing faster than the institutions that support it.

Britain's education system and government have failed to keep pace with the changing world of work. As a result, many people are being let down at both the beginning and the end of their working lives.



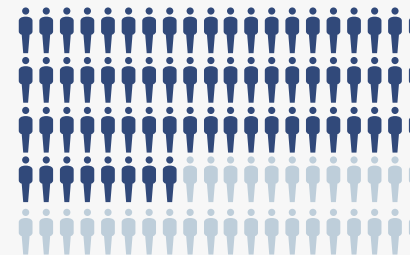
A system struggling to keep pace

Education



74%

say the education system does not prepare young people for modern work



68%

say schools and universities are out of sync with today's careers

Government



67%

believe successive governments have failed to prepare younger generations for the modern world of work



54%

say entrepreneurship is not well supported in the UK, with limited support for people wanting to run their own businesses

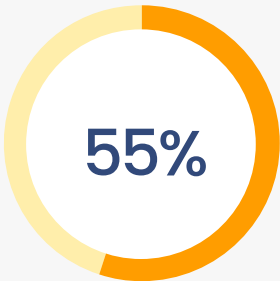
Young people are shut out, and starting up

Young people are entering a very different world of work from the generations before them.

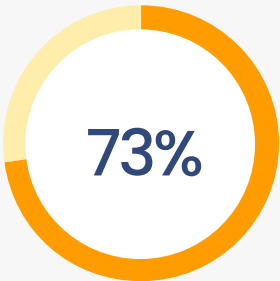
Traditional career paths are harder to access, and alternative ways of earning a living are becoming increasingly mainstream.



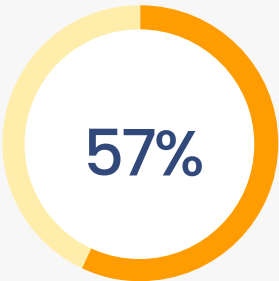
Breaking into work has become harder



believe young people are discriminated against because they lack experience, communication skills or productivity



of 18–24-year-olds believe this is how their generation is viewed



believe there are few employment opportunities for young people today.

Alternative careers



81% believe young people are already making money through side hustles, social media or starting businesses.



80% believe young people are working in jobs unrelated to their education.

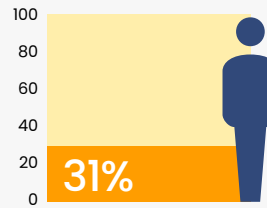
Midlife switchers pushed out

For many midlife workers, rather than winding down gradually, they feel they are being pushed off the career ladder too soon. Their experience is undervalued, progression opportunities diminish and finding a new role becomes harder.

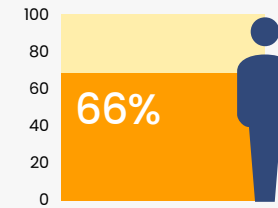
Increasingly, however, leaving corporate life is not the end of a career but the beginning of a second act. Business ownership is becoming a positive route back into meaningful, rewarding work.



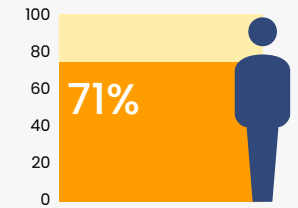
Pushed out



believe workers are viewed as "too old" by age 55.



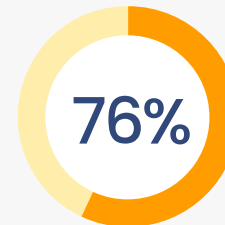
believe over-50s are more likely to be pushed out than supported.



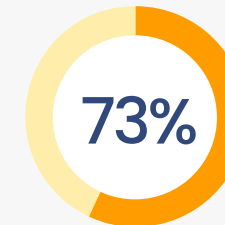
believe older workers are first to be targeted during redundancies.



Experience overlooked



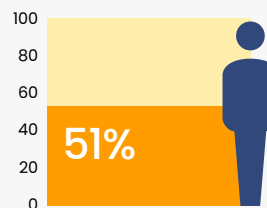
believe workers over 50 struggle to find new jobs.



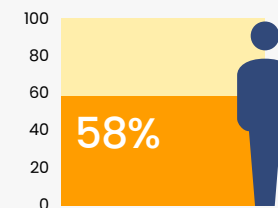
believe employers undervalue the experience and skills of older workers.



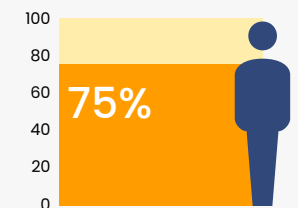
The second-act entrepreneur



believe older workers increasingly turn to business ownership or self-employment after leaving corporate roles.



of 45-55-year-olds agree.



of self-employed people see this as a growing trend.

Building an ownership economy



Conclusion

Over more than three decades of helping people buy and sell businesses, we've seen our market evolve. The profile of today's business buyer is changing, and the Business Ownership Index illustrates this.

Experienced entrepreneurs and seasoned investors remain active, but they're now increasingly joined by younger people questioning traditional careers, professionals looking for greater independence, and older workers exploring a second act after corporate life.

Artificial intelligence, economic uncertainty, longer working lives, ageism, and a more fragile jobs market are reshaping how we think about our futures.

Education must better reflect the realities of today's careers, and support young people into work. Public policy should back entrepreneurship and business ownership, and offer financial support and incentives needed to turn ambition into reality. And people should be helped to better understand every route into business ownership, whether that means starting a business or buying an existing one.

Getting these things right represents a major opportunity for Britain.

The entrepreneurial spirit is well and truly alive. For many, buying or starting a business is now seen as an appealing and credible alternative, offering greater independence, financial security and opportunity.

If we can support more people to build or buy businesses, the benefits extend far beyond individual success, creating jobs, strengthening communities and driving economic growth.

Andrew Markou, CEO, BusinessesForSale.com

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you need to know
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Methodology

[BusinessesForSale.com](https://www.BusinessesForSale.com) commissioned a nationally representative survey of 2,027 UK adults about their attitudes and behaviour to work, careers, and entrepreneurship. Savanta ran the survey in May 2026. All charts and data points in this Index are based on this survey unless otherwise stated.

About BusinessesForSale.com

BusinessesForSale.com is the world's largest marketplace for buying and selling businesses. Founded in 1996, the site hosts tens of thousands of business listings at any given time. It attracts millions of users each month, connecting prospective buyers with businesses of all sectors and sizes.

With a focus on demystifying business ownership, BusinessesForSale.com aims to make buying a business accessible to ordinary people and to support individuals transitioning from employment into ownership. www.BusinessesForSale.com.

