

ESG Monitor: Responsible Business 2024

WHAT THE **UK** PUBLIC EXPECTS.



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Foreword.

Expectations for what makes a 'good' business have changed forever. To be trusted, widely respected, to be a business that people want to work for and with no longer means just making loads of money.

Good business has to be sustainable, a good employer and supply chain partner, to support communities and to be an agent for positive change.

Business has to use the resources and funding it controls to lead responsibly and deliver better outcomes for all its stakeholders. On top of this, it also has to generate revenues, investment returns, wages, profits and tax receipts.

All of this takes place in a judgemental world fuelled by increasing scrutiny and activism where pledging to lead change isn't enough, business has to prove it is delivering.

Statements like this do not fall onto neutral political ground and the push back against ESG by critics, who call corporate responsibility out as 'woke capitalism' continues to grow. Yet on the other side of the fence, activist, public and political voices are advocating for greater corporate ambition.

Navigating this complexity and understanding how perceptions and expectations of business are changing is critical if corporates are to grasp the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls.

To help inform that analysis, SEC Newgate develops and runs its annual ESG Monitor research, polling over 14,000 people across 14 countries to understand their views.

What it shows is that corporate responsibility remains a growing trend and expectation which lies at the heart of what it means to be a good business with a good reputation.

The questions our clients ask us...

We know that reputation and responsible business conduct are inextricably linked - and our clients are grappling with the best ways to deliver on public expectations.

1.

"Do consumers care about ESG issues? Does it make a difference in their behaviour?"

2.

"Where do we start? What actions are the right fit for us?"

3.

"Which of all the good things we do should we talk about?"

4.

"Is it actually okay to talk about the good things we do?"

5.

"We're worried about the risk of public backlash for speaking out"

6.

"How do we avoid being accused of greenwashing?"

7.

"We're spending a lot of money on communicating but it's just not resonating..."

8.

"Should we be taking a position on social or political issues?"

Background & methodology.

For the fourth year running, SEC Newgate has conducted global research to understand community awareness and perceptions around Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues and actions by corporates in this space.

This year, the UK study explores ESG issues within the broader context of **responsible business** conduct.

15 minute
online survey

This research is part of the annual global 'ESG Monitor', and this report presents the 2024 findings from the United Kingdom (UK).

1,036 

Respondents
from **the UK**

14,352

Respondents
across **14 countries**
and territories

Participants were sourced from global panel provider PureProfile, with the survey translated and completed in-language where appropriate.

Fieldwork was conducted from 4th - 29th July 2024.

The final results have been weighted by age and gender to be nationally representative.

Reinforcement of **Responsible Business** as an area of public scrutiny.

EXTENDING ROLE AND IMPACT

Companies are expected to focus on more than profit - they need to play an active role in society

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Strong expectations on business leaders to pave the way

INVESTOR THREAT

Retail investors exhibit stronger expectations of responsible business conduct, and will act if trust is breached

CLARITY OF ACTIONS NEEDED

Public want clearer communication on what companies are doing to improve their performance

BALANCING AGENDAS IS KEY

A fine balance to be achieved on when and how companies should speak publicly on issues that are not related to their business

RESPONSIBILITY IS A REQUIREMENT

Conducting business in a responsible way is now an expectation

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

Younger generations expect businesses to take a stance on environmental and political issues

Key take-outs from the research

Today's businesses must be profitable and well-governed, but there is a **clear public expectation of action** - and better performance - **on environmental and social issues**

BUSINESS VIABILITY AND PROFITABILITY

- Provide high quality products or services
- Have good financial performance

STRONG CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

- Treat employees fairly
- Be open and transparent
- Have leaders focused on conducting responsible business



ACTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL GOOD

- Play a more active role in society
- Act to improve sustainability and reduce environmental harm
- Support and collaborate with local communities



COMMUNICATING TO THE PUBLIC

- Communicate progress on company performance on environmental, social and governance issues
- Speak publicly on issues that are related to the company and its stakeholders - but be selective on when to speak out on broader social and environmental issues

Businesses can strengthen their reputation with communication of their responsible action, enhanced by speaking out selectively on wider issues

For more information and to explore how we can work together to enhance your company's reputation and ESG impact, please contact research@secnewgate.co.uk