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The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, M.P.,  
Chancellor of the Exchequer,  
HM Treasury,  
1 Horse Guards Road,  
London.  
SW1A 2HQ

1<sup>st</sup> February, 2023

Dear *Chancellor,*

The Business Services Association - the BSA - brings together all those who are interested in delivering efficient, flexible, and cost-effective service and infrastructure projects across the private and public sectors. Members include businesses of all sizes, charities, and social enterprises. A full list of members is included as an annex. 70 per cent of business services are provided business-to-business and 30 per cent for the public sector. The sector employs c.3.3 million people across the UK, accounting for around 1 in 10 jobs. The innovation the sector drives is therefore crucial to achieving UK objectives around economic stability, long-term prosperity, and our transition to Net Zero.

As you are aware, the economic pressures facing the country are considerable and wide-ranging. The challenges which businesses and VCSEs are experiencing must also be seen in the context of the impact of the pandemic, widespread inflation, Brexit, Ukraine, and labour shortages. Our submission focusses on the following: project delivery; investment in 'place, people, and projects'; supporting business and VCSEs. The BSA's Economic Tracker captures the impact of these challenges on members and our latest report, covering the 12 editions released over 2022, is attached for reference.

Reforms to public procurement can lead to enhanced project delivery, ensure value for money, and significant long-term government savings. The BSA has long called for continued efforts to upgrade, extend and modernise the UK's physical, social, and digital infrastructure as the focus for spending. This support will ensure that businesses have the confidence to continue to invest in both their people and their operations.

In addition to these areas, we support the Government's ambitions to address longstanding problems with productivity, increase investment, and encourage people of all ages to make a contribution to the workplace. We need to break the cycle of high taxation, poor productivity, and sluggish investment. In addition to reforms to R&D tax relief, one proposal would be to explore a wholesale reform of inheritance tax and abolishing the pension cap, with the aim of creating tax incentives which encourage people to invest in entrepreneurial projects and drive the innovation and enterprise which is key to growth.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss in greater detail how the sector and our members can support the Government in securing our economic stability, driving a green economic recovery, delivering world-class public services, levelling up the whole country, and unleashing Britain's potential.

Yours sincerely,

**Mark Fox**  
Chief Executive  
BSA - The Business Services Association



## Submission ahead of Spring Budget 2023

February 2023

### Background and Overview

#### *Introduction*

The business services sector has a vital role to play in ensuring that investment is spent as efficiently as possible. We deliver administrative services, facilities management, infrastructure, and IT so that our business clients can focus on what they do best: enabling and encouraging businesses to invest in themselves and their workforce. Working in partnership with the public sector also brings new thinking, investment and the ability to scale. In addition to this, the sector delivers crucial advice and support services that enable businesses, both large and small, and in every region, to become more productive, profitable and competitive.

All of this will be crucial in re-establishing economic stability, driving our economic recovery, supporting jobs and local businesses across the country, adding social value, and delivering services and infrastructure of the highest quality to the British public.

Market stability is a pre-condition to economic growth, long-term productivity, and competitiveness. We therefore welcome the Chancellor's commitment to restoring this stability which is key to giving markets and business the confidence to invest in our economy.

#### *Challenges Facing the Sector*

The BSA launched its Economic Tracker at the beginning of the year to monitor the key areas affecting the business services sector in the UK. The Tracker is refreshed and circulated with BSA members on a monthly basis, with the question-set regularly reviewed in order to best capture the issues affecting the sector. Our latest report, covering the 12 editions released over 2022, can be read online [here](#) and is attached for reference.

Members' feedback has highlighted that the sector is facing a myriad of pressures; from well-publicised levels of inflation in the cost of core goods and services, to labour shortages across a variety of jobs and industries which are crucial to both key national infrastructure and the wider economy. Members are reporting cost increases from base materials (particularly timber, steel and copper) to specific products such as microchips. These trends are expected to continue with respondents all indicating that these increases would impact on their business operations over the next twelve months.

Labour shortages pose a considerable challenge for the business services sector. Shortages weaken organisations' ability to operate at full capacity and to invest in upskilling their existing workforce. These pressures have subsequent impacts on growth potential and market competitiveness. Businesses and voluntary organisations continue to fully engage with existing immigration schemes, however we would urge the Government to explore further pragmatic steps alongside the development of the UK's domestic labour force. Larger members have also commented on the acute pressures that labour shortages place on SMEs in their supply chains and the disruption this causes.

We are pleased to see that government recognises the challenges facing both our sector and the wider economy, and has introduced policies aimed at addressing these. We would welcome any further measures to support businesses and VCSE organisations as they look to mitigate the economic impact of the pressures outlined above, including further guidance and support for small businesses and VCSE organisations as they navigate the challenges of energy price increases.



## **Part One - Project Delivery**

### *Delivery of Public Services*

The way government manages its supply chain is crucial to the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and our wider economy. Recent steps to increase the effectiveness of public service delivery have been positive but there is still much that can be done to improve upon this.

Our industry has a vital role to play in ensuring that investment is spent as efficiently as possible, thereby bolstering our economic stability, supporting jobs and local businesses across the country, and delivering services and infrastructure of the highest quality to the British public. The BSA has welcomed the positive engagement from Cabinet Office ministers and officials in this regard, not least as the Procurement Bill continues its progress through Parliament.

HM Treasury also has a key role to play here in ensuring the maximum realisation of the potential benefits of these reforms. For example, ensuring that contracting authorities have the necessary commercial capacity will be crucial to the Government's welcome ambitions for involving more SMEs in the delivery of our public services. Investment in both people and systems will be key to driving the cultural and behavioural changes that such reforms necessitate.

Procurement processes and cultures are inconsistent across Whitehall and a significant policy initiative is needed to ensure all central government departments procure in the same way. This requires a policy, administrative, and cultural change across Whitehall.

We would also like to emphasise that much of the success of the proposed reforms will rest on ensuring consistent application and implementation across contracting authorities, including at a local and devolved level. We believe, however, that the Government can further drive market changes via investment in both people and systems in this area. Unfortunately, there is still evidence of poor contracting behaviours including iniquitous risk transfer, inconsistency across departments, and excessive complexity in the tendering process.

These behaviours not only impact upon the efficiency with which taxpayer money is spent but also distort the market by effectively prohibiting the wider participation of potential suppliers, such as VCSE and SME organisations, within the procurement process.

### *Contract Flexibility*

One of the lessons arising from the Covid-19 pandemic for service delivery was the importance of contract flexibility. BSA members acted agilely and played a vital role in keeping the economy going, delivering services and projects.

For the most part, this was possible because of their ability to adapt and worked best where contracts can be flexed to meet new and changing requirements. The last three years have shone a light on the impact unforeseeable events can have on services and projects. This is particularly true for contracts of 5 years or longer. It is in the interest of all parties that there are mechanisms in place to address this in a structured way. For example, government does not yet recognise 'change in law' as a risk that may not sit best with suppliers. This area is key in respect of risk allocation and realisation of value for money, and we therefore recommend that this is reviewed.

In addition to the above, we urge colleagues within HM Treasury to be mindful of the implications of ongoing labour shortages and widespread inflation for government contracts. As we have raised in our discussions with ministers and government officials, these pressures are being felt across the sector and are expected to have a direct effect on costs which would in turn impact on pricing considerations in government projects and services.



## **Part Two - Investment**

### *Supporting the UK's physical, social and digital infrastructure*

Whilst remaining mindful of the difficult decisions that lie ahead, we must also ensure that we do not lose sight of those projects and policies that will both secure, and embed greater resilience in, our future economy.

In particular, we urge the Government to consider the positive impact that commitment to large-scale infrastructure projects has in boosting business and market confidence. The construction and infrastructure industry is of key strategic importance to the UK economy and has a particular role to play as we look to restore economic stability and rebuild our economy. The scale and flow of work that large projects bring, such as HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, in turn provide greater certainty for industry to invest in other ventures and in modernisation. The industry supports jobs and local businesses through supply chains that cover all regions across the United Kingdom.

Government and employers can also continue to drive the skills agenda in order to help people enter or re-enter the workforce, or progress within work. In short, the investment in both people and place that the Government can support with these large-scale projects is vital to our economic recovery in the short term as well as our long-term prosperity.

In addition to this, significant and sizeable projects committed to using modern methods of construction and digitisation give industry more confidence to invest and a platform through which to embed digital ways of working. In turn, this helps to accelerate the modernisation of the industry and supports smaller organisations operating within larger contractors' supply chains.

The experiences of those who have been working from home at one point or another over the past three years have also highlighted how crucial our digital infrastructure is and its importance to the functionality of our wider economy. We must also consider the long-term impact that the coronavirus pandemic will have on the future of work in this country and the central role that digital infrastructure will play in this.

The benefits of increased digital infrastructure, such as the introduction of gigabit capable broadband, will be felt across the UK economy and the Treasury should continue to work with industries where the benefits of digital improvements could prove transformative, such as business services, to pilot particular technologies. This will be key to addressing the 'digital divide' that inhibits the levelling up agenda in areas that are currently underserved in this regard.

### *Green Investment*

Climate change and sustainability remain a priority for BSA members and we have seen many organisations from all sectors commit to net zero carbon by 2050 at the latest - following government's lead - and to playing their part in tackling the effects of climate change. For BSA members, actions towards net zero are two-fold: as well as reducing the environmental impact of their own organisations, many members deliver services to private and public sector organisations to help them become more energy efficient and act more sustainably.

As we look towards green recovery, many businesses may not have the funds readily available to invest in green capital projects in the short-medium term. Financial stimulus may therefore be needed so as to support low carbon technologies. For example, a low interest loan for green capital investments, supported by government, would enable businesses to make vital energy efficiency upgrades to their sites.





There is also the opportunity for the Government to lead by example, as one of the largest occupiers of commercial buildings in the UK, by investing in its own property portfolio. Ensuring that government departments have sufficient resources to invest in energy efficiency across the commercial property estate, scaled up across the UK, would result in a huge reduction in carbon emissions, enabling business to drive a green agenda and support the Race to Zero.

These capital projects would also create jobs across the UK, from low to high-skilled, often in STEM areas, and would be well-suited to apprenticeships. Moreover, some of the UK's biggest energy users are in the nation's more deprived areas, so such action would support the 'levelling up' agenda.

### *Upskilling and Reskilling*

Finally, it is important to recognise that government and employers can continue to support workers and drive future economic growth through the skills agenda. There is considerable opportunity here, tied to local labour market needs, to help people enter or re-enter the workforce, or progress within work.

The coronavirus pandemic and the current economic landscape have highlighted the importance of a flexible approach to upskilling and reskilling people; in turn reducing the skills gap, supporting the levelling up agenda, and driving our transition to Net Zero. Upskilling and reskilling will be vital to ensuring that workers have the skills that the future economy needs and in meeting the challenges of today.

We therefore urge the Government, and particularly the DfE and DWP, to join up social infrastructure provision encompassing careers advice, skills provision and employment support. This will create joined up learning, work and progression pathways for young people struggling to start their careers, as well as career change and lifelong learning opportunities for displaced older workers.

We urge the Treasury to work with DfE and BEIS to consider practical reforms to current skills programmes including the Apprenticeship Levy. For example, employers and providers have long called for increased flexibility within the provision of apprenticeships, including the limitations around the use of Apprenticeship Levy funds.

We therefore encourage HM Treasury to consider practical reforms to the Levy to support recruitment and retention including:

- reforming the Levy into a broader and more flexible system, including allowing for apprenticeships that do not require a 12-month long programme;
- allowing employers more flexibility in being able to use Levy funds for part time workers or shorter courses (such as Functional Skills including maths, English, and ESOL, as well as digital skills);
- allowing Levy employers to use a % of their Levy funds to pay salaries for new recruited apprentices; and,
- allowing employers to utilise levy funding to support new starters by purchasing the tech and hardware needed for the role and their learning assessments.

BSA members stand ready to play their part in supporting a system that works best for employers, providers and, above all, the learners themselves.



## **Part Three - Supporting Businesses and VCSEs**

### *Background*

As outlined above, business services providers are currently dealing with several upward pressures that are impacting on margins and they are acutely sensitive to changes in the business environment and the cost of employment in particular (as labour costs account for the largest expense in outsourcing contracts).

We welcome the decision to continue to support both households and businesses with the rising cost of energy and would urge that ongoing engagement and guidance continue as the various support measures are introduced or updated.

We would caution against any further increase to the burden of regulation and taxation on business as they look to mitigate the range of economic pressures they are currently facing. We would also encourage the Government to explore further measures to support business such as long overdue reforms to the VAT regime - as made possible by our departure from the European Union.

It is vital that people and businesses are encouraged to be economically productive, thereby helping drive the economy forward into the growth areas of the future. We are entering a new period of work, in which changes which were already taking place are now being accelerated, and government policy must respond to those changes and help businesses adapt. This is particularly pressing following our departure from the European Union and we look forward to continuing to work with government to ensure that businesses and voluntary organisations in Britain thrive and prosper under the new arrangement.

Government has a clear part to play in supporting people and businesses as they navigate the complex economic landscape that we are facing. Whilst we recognise the pressures on public finances we would caution against any further increase to the burden of regulation and taxation on business as they look to mitigate the range of economic challenges they are currently facing.

### *VAT reform*

Having completed our transition period and formally exited the European Union, we would urge the Government to consider whether the VAT regime could be amended to address the concerns of business and simplify the taxation process. VAT is a longstanding area of concern for members.

The BSA has also previously discussed with HM Treasury the difficulty of VAT recovery faced by VAT exempt organisations when they outsource services. Following our departure from the European Union, we would urge the Government to address the VAT rule which restricts a level playing field from operating in certain areas of public sector delivery, including social housing and further education colleges. As social housing organisations are exempt from VAT, for example, independent providers need to be at least 20 per cent cheaper to begin to be competitive. This also serves as an additional barrier that particularly affects those SMEs and VCSE organisations who are keen to participate in the delivery of our public services.



## **BSA Economic Tracker**

### **Annual Report 2022**

**February 2023**

#### **Background and Overview**

The BSA - Business Services Association - brings together all those who are interested in delivering efficient, flexible, and cost-effective service and infrastructure projects across the private and public sectors. 70 per cent of business services are provided business-to-business and 30 per cent for the public sector. The sector employs c.3.3 million people across the UK, accounting for around 1 in 10 jobs. BSA members include businesses of all sizes, charities, and social enterprises<sup>1</sup>. A full list of members is included as an Annex.

The BSA Economic Tracker was launched in January 2022 to provide a regular economic overview of the areas impacting the business services sector. The Tracker is refreshed and circulated with BSA members on a monthly basis. Each month, the questions were reviewed and, if necessary, updated to reflect both members' feedback and the wider economic landscape.

The Tracker both reflects the importance of BSA members and the business services sector to the UK economy and provides an insight into the key areas affecting the sector. Anonymised monthly reports are passed on to BEIS and other key stakeholders, who have fed back how useful they have found members' responses. Our anonymised summaries have also been shared with the Minister for Industry's office and the Permanent Secretary.

The 2022 Tracker was divided into four sections: an organisation overview, external pressures, labour supply, and inbound goods and services. This report reflects responses gathered through the first twelve editions of the Tracker running January to December 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Economics, 2015. The use of business services by UK industries and the impact on economic performance. <https://www.bsa.org.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/OE-report-for-BSA-Productivity-report-Sept2015.pdf>



## Section One: Executive Summary

The BSA Economic Tracker was launched in January 2022 and has been available for all BSA members to complete as it has been refreshed each month. A full list of members is included as an annex.

The Economic Tracker captures the trajectory of the UK economy over 2022 as experienced by BSA members. This includes the easing of Covid-19 regulations, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and a significant period of market and global instability in Q3. BSA members have also provided insights into their experiences of new trading, funding, investment, recruitment, and regulatory arrangements following our departure from the European Union. Members reported the impacts of these and other factors on their operations, confidence, and decisions.

Members were asked to consider the extent to which the challenges they faced were reflected in contract terms. As widespread inflation placed pressure on organisations across the sector, they reported challenges with indexation and inflexibility in some government contracts and increased associated risks and costs. Organisations also highlighted inconsistencies in bid validity and commercial expertise across the private and public sectors.

In 2022, the most widely reported issue by organisations of all sizes and industry related to labour supply. Labour and skills shortages were reported across industries crucial to both key national infrastructure and the wider economy, including (but not limited to) digital, finance, frontline services, engineering, and hospitality. Shortages not only affected respondents' own organisations but also the organisations in their supply chains, and reported consequences included reduced capacity, disruption to service delivery, and restrictions on potential growth. While recruitment and retention remained difficult throughout the year, the proportion of members reporting above-average vacancies began to slow by Q3/Q4. From discussions with members this may be attributed either to organisations adapting their operations in light of labour shortages or a change in recruitment policy in the context of wider economic uncertainty.

The changing and, often inflationary, cost of goods and services were a challenge for the majority of respondents in 2022, who reported both experiencing and expecting price increases from base materials (particularly timber, steel and copper) to specific products such as IT hardware and insurance. These trends are expected to continue, with all respondents indicating that expected increases would continue to impact their business operations, confidence, and growth over 2023. Members also highlighted the impacts of increased costs on employee wellbeing. The Tracker collected insights as the first signs, consequences, and support measures relating to energy price rises unfolded throughout 2022.

As the implications of the war in Ukraine continued to unfold, members reported cybersecurity concerns and supply chain disruption, with extended lead times and reduced availability of some products. In all, the BSA's Economic Tracker is a useful and indicative guide to the issues affecting the business services sector, across industry and firm size.

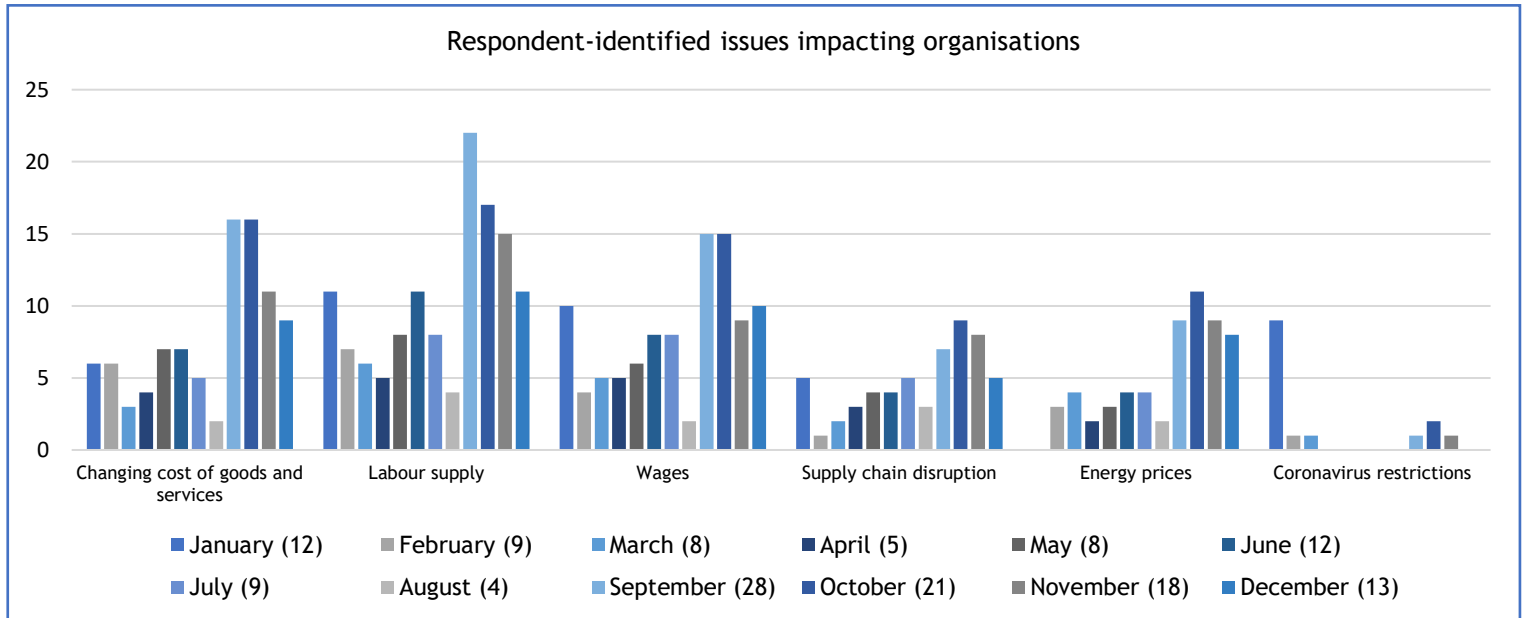
### Key points

- Labour supply was the most widely reported issue impacting member organisations.
- Labour shortages in engineering, hospitality, and digital industries were identified most commonly in 2022.
- Vacancies have remained above or significantly above normal levels for a majority of respondents. All respondents' business operations have been impacted by vacancies, although this is falling.
- The majority of respondents report experiencing and expecting increases in costs.
- External inflationary pressures affected respondents throughout 2022 and are expected to do so well into 2023.





## Respondent-identified issues



(Figure 1: Bar chart showing respondent-identified issues)

	0-24% respondents affected			25-49% respondents affected			50-74% respondents affected			75-100% respondents affected		
	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Changing cost of goods and services	5/12	5/9	2/8	2/5	3/8	7/12	5/9	2/4	16/28	16/18	11/18	9/13
Labour supply	11/12	7/9	6/8	5/5	8/8	11/12	8/9	4/4	22/28	17/21	15/18	11/13
Wages	10/12	4/9	5/8	5/5	6/8	8/12	8/9	2/4	15/28	15/21	9/18	10/13
Supply chain disruption	5/12	1/9	2/8	3/5	4/8	4/12	5/9	3/4	7/28	9/21	11/18	5/13
Energy prices	1/12	3/9	4/8	2/5	3/8	4/12	4/9	2/4	9/28	11/21	9/18	8/13
Coronavirus restrictions	9/12	1/9	1/8	0/5	0/8	0/12	0/9	0/4	1/28	2/21	1/18	0/13

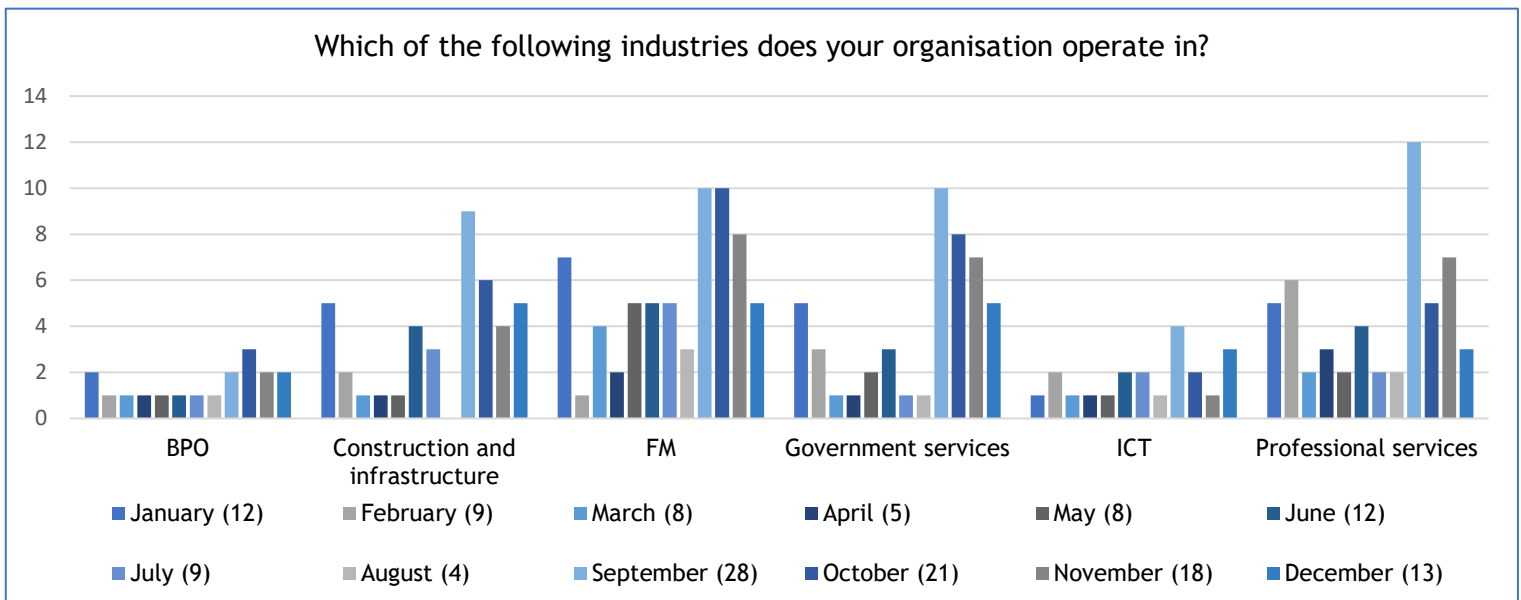
(Figure 2: Table showing a breakdown of the issues identified)



## Section Two: Respondent Overview

### Key Points

- The five strands which make up the business services sector - ICT and digital services, business process outsourcing (BPO), facilities management (FM), construction and infrastructure services, and managed public services - have been represented in every month except one.
- The majority of respondents operate across professional services, government services, and construction and infrastructure services. The majority also operate across multiple industries.
- Typically, larger organisations were more likely to respond.



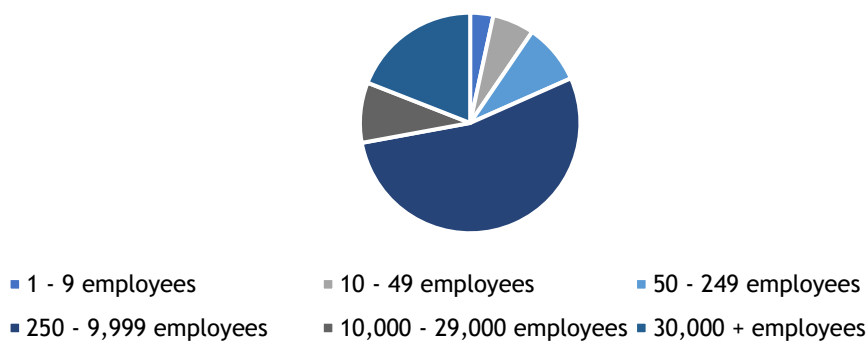
(Figure 3: Bar chart showing which industries Tracker respondents operate in)

### Organisation

### size

The majority of respondents each month employ 250-9,999 employees. 1-7 organisations employing at least 10,000 people have been represented each month.

### Jan-Dec organisation sizes (average % respondents)



(Figure 4: Pie chart showing the average sizes of Tracker respondent firms)



## Section Three: Labour supply

### Key Points

- Labour supply was identified as an issue by a significant majority of respondents every month in 2022 (88% on average).
- Labour and skills shortages were most commonly reported across the digital, finance, and hospitality industries.
- All respondents' supply chains were impacted by labour shortages in the last three quarters of 2022.
- Once introduced as a selectable option in April, the cost of living was consistently identified as a challenge, with nearly all organisations raising it as an issue.
- Almost all respondents' workforces raised the cost of living to at least a small extent.
- Respondents consistently found it difficult to recruit, and the proportion of respondents finding it difficult to retain employees increased throughout 2022.
- The proportion of vacancies reporting as above average fell over the course of 2022, as did the severity of the associated impact.

### Breakdown as a total of respondents

	0-24% respondents affected			25-49% respondents affected			50-74% respondents affected			75-100% respondents affected		
	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Labour supply</b>	11/12	7/9	6/8	5/5	8/8	11/12	8/9	4/4	22/28	17/21	15/18	11/13
<b>Wages</b>	10/12	4/9	5/8	5/5	6/8	8/12	8/9	2/4	15/28	15/21	9/18	10/13
<b>Pensions</b>	0/12	1/9	1/8	0/5	0/8	0/12	1/9	0/4	1/28	1/21	0/18	0/13
<b>NI contributions</b>	NA	1/9	1/8	0/5	0/8	1/12	0/9	0/4	0/28	1/21	0/18	0/13
<b>Cost of living</b>	NA	NA	NA	NA	1/8	1/12	1/9	2/4	2/28	3/21	1/18	1/13

(Figure 5: Table showing a breakdown of the issues identified relating to labour supply)

### Cost of living

- The impact of the cost of living on employees was added in June, and between one and three respondents have reported it as an issue affecting their organisations each month since.
- All respondents except one have seen the increased cost of living raised by their workforce to at least a small extent.
- The proportion of respondents' workforces raising the issue to a large extent has risen since June, while the proportion raising the issue to a small extent has fallen.
- Large and medium-sized respondents have reported that the cost of living is impacting staff wellbeing.



## Labour shortages by job-type

The following shortages were identified over **six or more months in 2022:**

- Digital and cyber (10/12 months)
- Engineering, particularly environmental engineering (every month from April - December)
- Finance professionals (every month except March)
- Hospitality and catering, particularly skilled chefs (every month except March)
- IT (9/12 months)
- PFI general managers (every month except January)
- Project management (8/12 months)
- Specialist FM (7/12 months)

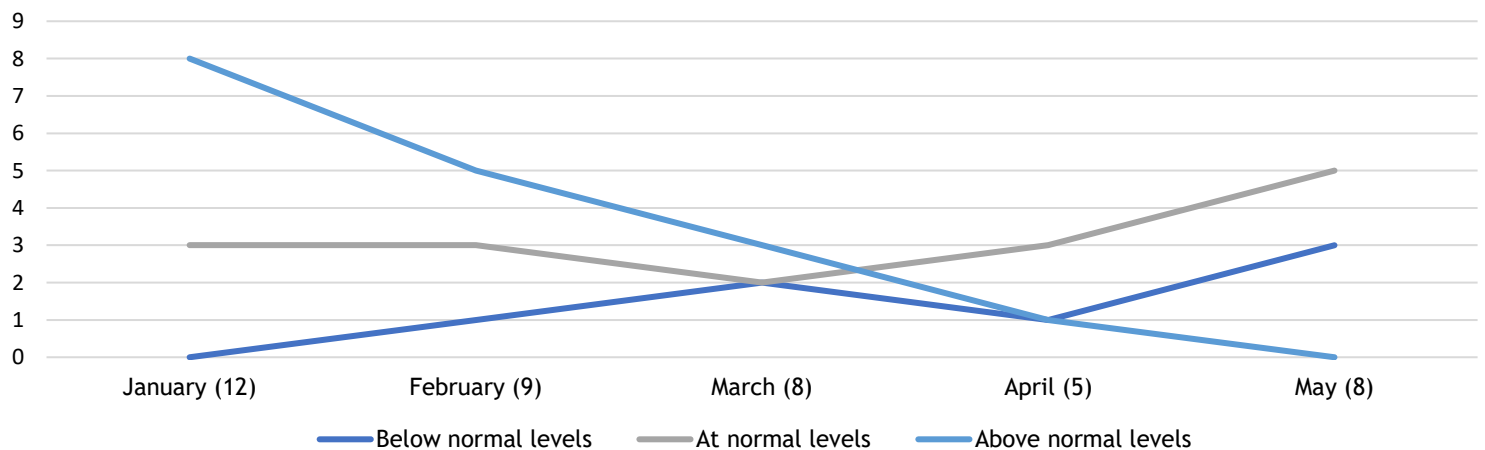
## Impact of labour shortages on respondents' supply chains

- We asked respondents how labour shortages impacted the organisations in their supply chains; the majority of respondents each month impacts to a small or some extent.
- No respondents reported labour shortages having no impact on their supply chain since March.
- The proportion of respondents reporting a large impact on their supply chain rose from one or two from January to August, to an average of four in the last quarter of 2022.

## Sickness absences

- From January to May 2022, members reported sickness absences in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and associated isolation restrictions. These restrictions eased and this question was removed in June 2022.
- The majority of respondents in January and February reported absences above normal levels, whereas the majority of respondents in April and May reported absences at normal levels.
- Respondents reporting sickness absences below or at normal levels increased from January to May.
- The impact of staff absences also reduced, with a majority of respondents identifying 'some' or 'large' impact in January and February, but a majority of respondents identifying 'small' impacts in April and May.

Compared with previous years, how would you describe the number of absences across your organisation in the last three months?



(Figure 6: Graph showing the number of absences across respondent organisations in the last three months)



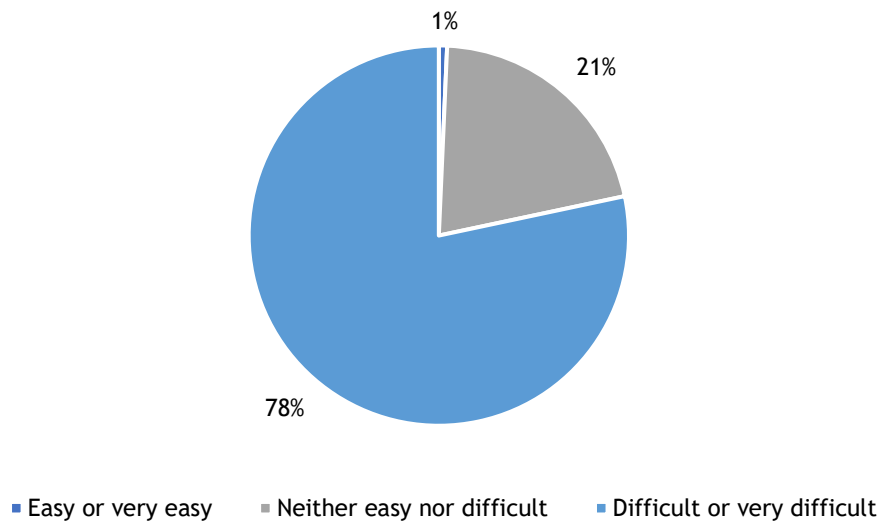
## Retention

- The proportion of respondents finding it difficult to retain employees doubled in Q3 and Q4.
- Large organisations described retention and high turnover as ‘new challenges’.

## Recruitment

- More than half of respondents every month reported finding it difficult or very difficult to recruit new employees.
- No respondent has ever reported finding it very easy to recruit, and only 1 has reported finding it easy (1/5 in April).
- Respondents described difficulties hiring people ‘fast enough to meet demand’, and large organisations raised concerns about recruitment challenges limiting their ability to maximise market opportunities.

Jan-Dec recruitment experiences (average % respondents)



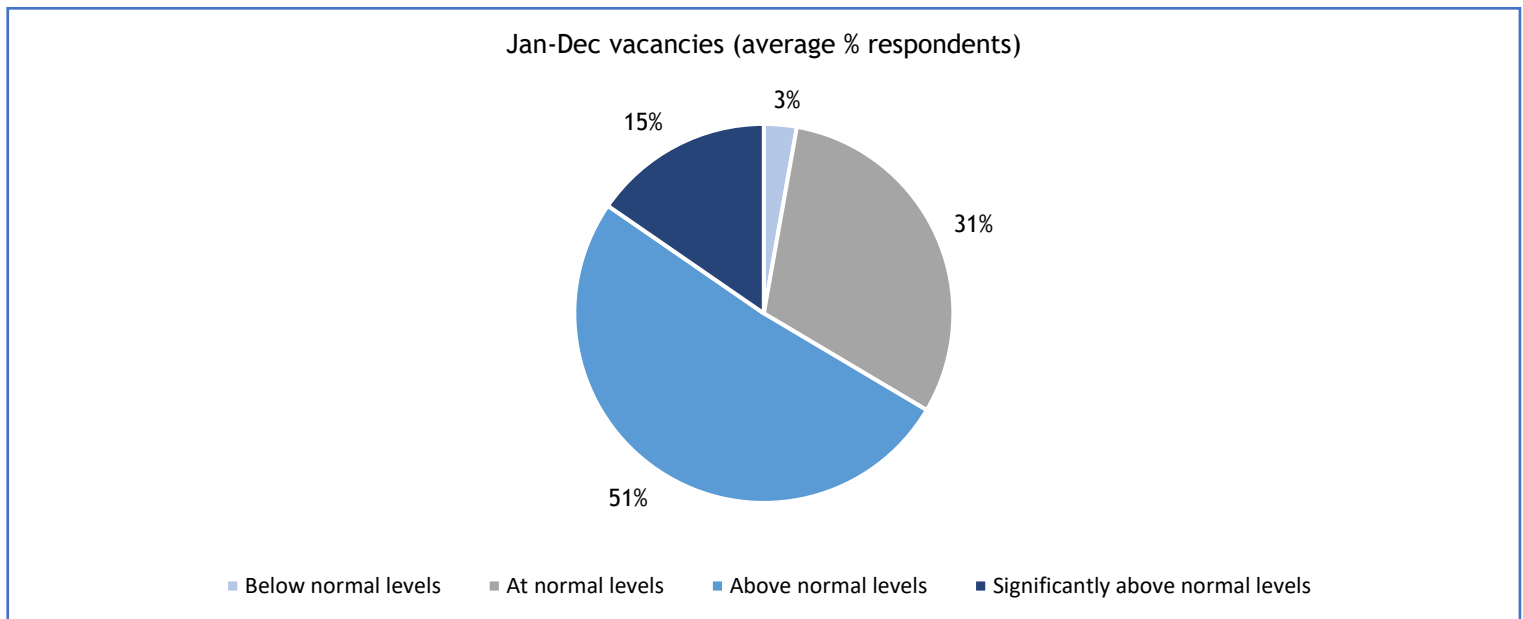
(Figure 7: Pie chart showing an average description of respondents' recruitment experiences)





## Vacancies

- Throughout 2022, the majority of respondents reported vacancies above normal levels. This changed over time: around 75% of respondents reported above-average vacancies between January and August, but this fell to just over half of respondents from September to December.
- Vacancies impacted the business operations of all respondents until September 2022. Since then, 2-3 respondents each month report no impact from vacancies. The proportion of respondents reporting large impacts from vacancies has fallen from 25% of respondents January to May, to an average of 11% since.
- From discussions with members this may be attributed either to organisations adapting their operations in light of labour shortages or a change in recruitment policy in the context of wider economic uncertainty.
- SME respondents described impacts on existing staff navigating increased demands, and on contract delivery. Larger organisations also noted that SMEs in their supply chains were particularly affected by high vacancy rates and the challenges associated with this.



(Figure 8: Pie chart showing an average description of respondents' vacancy levels)



## Section Four: Changing cost of goods and services

### Key points

- The changing cost of goods and services was identified every month as a top issue affecting respondents' organisations, particularly inflation.
- The majority of respondents every month reported both experiencing increases in the costs of goods and services as well as anticipating further increases in the subsequent months.
- Business operations of the majority of respondents were impacted by changing costs.
- Cost changes have been most often reported for base and building materials, IT hardware, and insurance.
- All respondents reported increases in energy prices in the last three quarters of 2022. However, the *impacts* of energy prices on operations fell throughout the year, perhaps reflecting government-led initiatives and business resilience operations.

### Respondent-identified issues impacting organisations

	0-24% respondents affected			25-49% respondents affected			50-74% respondents affected			75-100% respondents affected		
	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Changing cost of goods and services</b>	5/12	5/9	2/8	2/5	3/8	7/12	5/9	2/4	16/28	16/18	11/18	9/13
<b>Business rates</b>	0/12	1/9	0/8	0/5	0/8	0/12	0/9	0/4	2/28	1/21	0/18	0/13
<b>Taxation</b>	0/12	1/9	0/8	0/5	0/8	0/12	0/0	0/4	0/28	1/18	0/18	0/13
<b>Energy prices</b>	1/12	3/9	4/8	2/5	3/8	4/12	4/9	2/4	9/28	11/21	9/18	8/13
<b>Inflation</b>	1/12	1/9	2/8	2/5	4/8	7/12	7/9	3/4	12/28	11/21	7/18	8/13

(Figure 9: Table showing a breakdown of the issues identified relating to changing cost of goods and services)

### Particular goods and services

The following products were identified as particularly changing in cost **over three or more months**:

- Building materials (5/12 months)
- Food products (4/12 months)
- Insurance (5/12 months)
- IT hardware (5/12 months)
- Steel (5/12 months)

### Energy

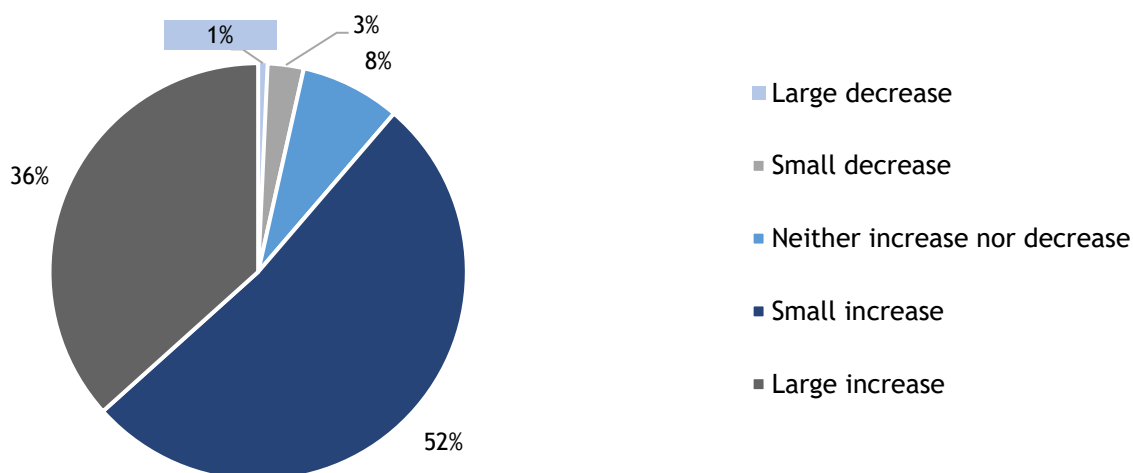
- Energy prices were added to the Tracker in February 2022 as an issue for members to identify. The extent of increases in energy and fuel were introduced as questions in April.
- 100% of respondents reported increases in energy prices to at least a small extent from April to December.
- From April to July, 100% of respondents reported operations being affected to at least a small extent by energy prices. Since September, however, an average three respondents each month report no impact. The proportion of respondents impacted to a large extent fell from around a quarter from April to July, to less than a fifth from September to December.
- When asked to identify policy interventions that have mitigated the impacts of energy prices, SMEs identified the energy price cap in September, and large organisations identified the Energy Bills Relief Scheme.



## Changing costs of goods and services

- The great majority of respondents (87% on average) identified increases in the cost of goods and services in the previous three months, including 100% of respondents in March, June, July and August.
- The number of respondents seeing a large increase in the cost of goods and services remained proportionate across 2022. Only five respondents identified decreases in the cost of goods and services, all in the last two quarters of the year. A small number of respondents (between one and three) reported seeing neither increases nor decreases in costs each month.
- On average, 90% of respondents each month expected costs to increase to at least a small extent in the coming three months, including 100% of respondents each month between March and September. The majority of respondents in December (10/13) expect costs to increase in the first three months of 2023.
- No respondent reported expecting costs to decrease at all over the coming three months until October, where four respondents did so. This fell to one respondent in November, and none in December.
- In eight out of 12 months, 100% of respondents were impacted to at least a small extent.
- 100% of respondents across size and industry expected changing costs to impact business operations to at least a small extent in 2023. The proportion of respondents expecting to be impacted to a small extent has fallen, while the proportion expecting to be impacted to some extent has risen. The proportion expecting to be impacted to a large extent remained consistent.
- Respondents often identified this impact 'across the board' or 'across every area' of their business. Impacts of changing costs have been described by firms of all sizes across all sectors in terms of reduced business confidence, squeezed tariffs, and constrained client budgets.
- In September and October, respondents across sizes and sectors expressed concerns about interest rates, pensions, mortgage and debt markets, Sterling devaluation, and property prices.

To what extent have you seen the cost of goods and services change over the previous three months (average % respondents)?



(Figure 10: Pie chart showing an average description of respondents' recruitment experiences)



## Section Five: Supply chain disruption

### Key points:

- Supply chain disruption has been raised by a consistent proportion of respondents.
- Sourcing goods and services was reported as neither easy nor difficult by the majority of respondents each month.
- The situation in Ukraine, Russia and other affected countries affected respondents' supply chains. The most commonly reported related product issues included IT equipment, wheat, oil, and building materials.
- Cybersecurity has been raised by a consistent proportion of respondents each month.
- The majority of respondents report issues reflected in contract terms to some extent.

### Respondent-identified issues impacting organisations

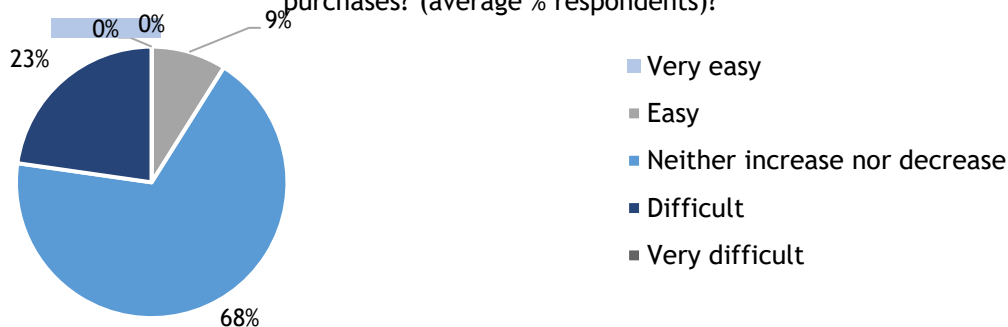
	0-24% respondents affected			25-49% respondents affected			50-74% respondents affected			75-100% respondents affected		
	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Supply chain disruption	5/12	1/9	2/8	3/5	4/8	4/12	5/9	3/4	7/28	9/21	11/18	5/13
The situation in Ukraine, Russia or other affected countries	NA	NA	2/8	3/5	4/8	5/12	3/9	0/4	5/28	5/21	6/18	3/13

(Figure 11: Table showing a breakdown of the issues identified relating to changing cost of goods and services)

### Sourcing goods and services:

- The large majority of respondents reported sourcing of goods and services being neither easy nor difficult each month in 2022.
- However, the proportion of respondents describing sourcing goods and services as difficult increased from approximately 20% of respondents between January and July to around 33% between August and December.
- No respondents ever reported finding sourcing goods and services either very easy or very difficult. The number of respondents finding sourcing easy has stayed around 0-3 each month. Respondents described challenges with extended lead times and availability of materials and equipment. To mitigate the impact, some organisations reported supply agreements and the forward-buying and/or stockpiling of components.

To what extent are you finding it difficult to source the goods and services the business purchases? (average % respondents?)



(Figure 12: Pie chart showing average description of respondents' supply chain experiences)



### **Impact of the war in Ukraine:**

- The war in Ukraine was added to the Tracker in March.
- The proportion of respondents having to alter their supply chains to at least a small extent in order to mitigate issues related to the situation in Ukraine grew from 45% on average between March and April, to 70% between April and December.
- The most commonly reported product issues related to the situation in Ukraine included reduced availability and/or quality of IT equipment and components, fish, wheat, rapeseed and sunflower oil, and building materials including steel and timber.

### **Regulatory challenges and EU exit**

- Regulatory issues were reported by 1-4 respondents in the first and last quarters of 2022 but were unreported between May and August.
- Three respondents raised challenges relating to EU Exit in 2022. This included references to 'red-tape', potential implications for foreign investment, and the prospect of funding 'cliff-edges' as EU programmes draw to a close.
- This area has since been added to the January 2023 edition of the Tracker and we will continue to monitor impacts as they develop.

### **Cybersecurity**

- Cybersecurity was added as an issue for organisations to select in March after being raised independently by a medium-sized organisation in January and February.
- Cybersecurity has been raised by between 2-6 respondents every month since March.

### **Public Sector Industrial action**

- Industrial action in the context of the public sector was added as an issue for organisations to select in August
- It was reported as an issue affecting organisations by 1-2 respondents from August to October. This rose in November (3/18) and again in December (5/13).
- The impacts on BSA members are varied. SMEs in the construction and infrastructure sectors reported reduced abilities to directly support regional project sites, while professional services SMEs relayed reduced business confidence and reduced downstream efficiency of clients. Organisations of varying sizes and sectors pointed to supply chain delays and limitations on business travel to in-person events and meetings. The most widely reported impact across all sectors and sizes was reduced office presenteeism; this was most concerning to members operating in the facilities management sector.

### **Contract terms**

- The majority of respondents reported that the issues affecting them have been reflected to at least some extent in typical contract terms.
- Respondents of all sizes and sectors often discussed inflationary pressures relating to contracts without indexation clauses, and perceived a lack of flexibility.
- Issues reflected in typical contract terms have been mitigated by medium-sized firms through fixed-price and/or future contracts not subject to cost inflation.
- Large and medium-sized organisations across government services, and construction and infrastructure services, reported challenges with accessing clear pipelines of investment in capital projects and foresight of public sector spending. They often attributed this perceived lack of forward-planning and visibility to delays in commissioning, procurement, and service delivery.





## Annex 1: List of BSA Members, February 2023

3C3 Ltd  
AECOM  
Alvarez and Marsal  
Amey Plc  
Aramark  
Atkins  
Atlas FM  
Atos  
AutogenAI  
Baachu  
Balfour Beatty Plc  
Barclays Corporate  
Bellrock  
Bevan Brittan LLP  
Bouygues E&S UK  
Browne Jacobson LLP  
BT Group Plc  
Business 2 Business  
Capita Plc  
Catch 22  
CGI  
CH & Co Group  
City FM  
Clyde & Co LLP  
CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang LLP  
Compass Group Plc  
Connections Consulting  
Corndel Ltd  
Costain  
Deloitte  
DWF LLP  
DXC Technology  
Elior UK Ltd  
Eric Wright FM  
Fujitsu UK  
G3 Systems Ltd  
G4S Plc  
Glaston Consulting  
GoodPeople  
Grant Thornton  
Hinduja Global Solutions  
HP  
IBM  
Ingeus  
ISS UK Ltd  
Jobs22  
Kier Group Plc  
KPMG  
Lumby CMS  
Mace  
Maple Strategy  
Maximus UK Ltd  
Mazars  
Medallia  
Mitie  
MTC  
NatWest  
NCG  
Netcompany UK Ltd  
OCS Group UK Ltd  
P3  
Pinsent Masons LLP  
Reed in Partnership  
Robertson FM  
Salisbury Group  
Seetec Group Ltd  
Serco Group Plc  
Sharpe Pritchard LLP  
Sodexo Ltd  
Sopra Steria Ltd  
Space Solutions  
Spend Network  
Strictly Education  
The Grichan Whitestone  
Partnership  
The Growth Company  
The Network Group  
The Palladium Group  
The Shaw Trust  
The Sustainability Group  
Turley  
Twin UK  
Veolia  
Vercity  
VINCI Facilities  
VPS Group  
Wand Consulting  
Wates Group  
Willmott Dixon  
WSP