

PA/06

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Ageing population 'biggest threat to business'

Britain's ageing population is the single biggest threat facing the UK economy over the course of the next decade, businesses have told a monthly internet survey run by the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI).

Panellists responding to the July UK Business Barometer (UKBB) poll, named fuel shortages and skills shortages as the next biggest worries to business over the next 10 years, which was also reflected in the results of its sister survey the UK Business Adviser Barometer (UKBAB).

Taking a shorter term view, over the coming two years, skills and fuel shortages were joined by a fear of higher taxation and the threat of terrorist activity in both surveys.

In April 2000, the UKBB survey focused on questions about banks because local branches were being closed in many communities. Following the recent announcements by some major banks that they intend to open new branches on Britain's high streets, the survey again asked respondents whether physical location of their bank is of importance to their business.

Compared to the responses of six years ago, the current survey indicated a small decrease in importance — around four per cent on average — while UKBAB respondents rate physical location of their banks slightly higher than UKBB respondents.

The decrease from the UKBB respondents may be down to more people using telephone or internet banking — 25 per cent said they used these services compared to just 14 per cent who still make a trip to their local branch. In the UKBAB responses, 24 per cent use internet or telephone banking and 17 per cent their local branch.

With the advent of online banking, bank statements are now readily available at any time of the day. Twenty-six per cent of UKBB respondents and 21 per cent of UKBAB respondents say they are now likely to become aware of a discrepancy in their firm's bank balance within a day as a result.

More follows...

The July survey also sought panellists' views on tolerance of late payment, training needs, internet search engines, gathering tacit knowledge and online health checks/reviewing tools for business.

The UK Business Barometer (UKBB) and UK Business Adviser Barometer (UKBAB) operate over the web to generate very rapid results. The surveys have unique software that enables results to be processed and posted on their respective websites immediately they arrive.

The survey results are published monthly and more information, including a press pack, can be found on the web at www.ukbb.ac and www.ukbab.ac Businesses and advisers wishing to contribute as panellists on the project should visit the appropriate Business Barometer website to register.

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Notes to editors: More information is available from Rick Eagles on + 44 (0)115 846 6860, richard.eagles@nottingham.ac.uk; Liz Rose on +44 (0)115 846 6189, liz.rose@nottingham.ac.uk or Press Officer Emma Thorne in the University's Public Affairs Office on +44 (0)115 951 5793, emma.thorne@nottingham.ac.uk