

UIBB/UKBAB October/November release reflecting September findings BB112/BAB61

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Taking a year out from working life

Most people associate gap years with students travelling the world before or after university – but the option is increasingly becoming part of mid-career life as well, according to an internet survey run by The University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI).

Mid-career gap years – to travel, study, do voluntary work or pursue other interests – have grown rapidly in popularity over the last decade. And the latest UK Business Barometer (UKBB) found there is now a growing feeling of support for them among company bosses.

The survey, found that 56 per cent of smaller businesses would consider a mid-career gap year as a ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’ attribute in a CV. Only eight per cent said they would view it in a negative light.

The UKBB and parallel UKBAB surveys, which are all completed online, assess current business conditions through a series of topical questions aimed at smaller businesses and their advisers. The questions change each month.

This month’s UKBB findings also highlight the increasing gap between businesses that embrace electronic communication and the internet, and those that do not. When asked about their attitudes towards potential customers and suppliers who don’t have an email or internet address, 79 per cent of them said they would have a ‘negative’ or ‘strongly negative’ view.

‘Cold calling’ was the subject of another question in this month’s survey. Although it is still one of the most widely used sales techniques, success rates are said to have dropped rapidly over the last decade. And being on the receiving end of a cold call is still extremely unpopular – only one per cent of survey respondents said they welcome unsolicited calls, while 37 per cent resent them and 34 per cent detest them.

Businesses were asked this month for their views on the level of education of school leavers, and their suitability for work after GCSEs. Panellists were asked to draw on their own experience of the abilities of recent school leavers to assess the extent to which there is a need for a review of the GCSE system. More than four-fifths thought it needed to be reviewed – 52 per cent in a comprehensive manner, and 30 per cent on a ‘light touch’ basis.

The UK Business Advisers Survey covered a broad range of issues faced by professionals working at the ‘coal face’ of business advice. When asked what was the single most important problem faced by their clients, the most common response from business advisers was ‘lack of time and/or capacity’. The next most significant issues were given as: government regulations and paperwork, marketing problems, sector-specific demands/problems, and marketing problems.

Asked how panellists believe that government can best assist business, 77 per cent of UKBAB respondents – by far the biggest proportion – said ‘reduction of regulations and red tape’. The next responses, from 48 per cent of panellists, said the government could help the most by targeted support schemes and services, and by addressing skills needs.

In terms of the most important problems they encountered when working with businesses, 40 per cent said that the clients' reluctance to take advice was one of their most important problems. The second biggest problem was Business Link/government restructuring, chosen by 38 per cent. Obtaining sufficient information to diagnose clients' real problems, and keeping up to date with relevant business regulations also come in the top five.

The UKBB and UKBAB are run by The University of Nottingham and 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: The University of Nottingham is Britain's University of the Year (The Times Higher Awards 2006). It undertakes world-changing research, provides innovative teaching and a student experience of the highest quality. Ranked by Newsweek in the world's Top 75 universities, its academics have won two Nobel Prizes since 2003. The University is an international institution with campuses in the United Kingdom, Malaysia and China.

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