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Wet summer hits businesses

Almost half of small and medium-sized businesses were adversely affected by this summer's downpours, according to an internet survey run by The University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI).

The latest UK Business Adviser Barometer (UKBAB) suggests that 44 per cent of businesses suffered as a result of the record-breaking rainfall – compared to just one per cent who reported a positive effect.

In July 2007, more than double the average rainfall was recorded in England and Wales, which caused extensive flooding in many areas. The three-month period from May to July this year was the wettest since records began in 1766.

The survey, which runs in parallel with the UK Business Barometer (UKBB) survey, 'takes the temperature' of current business conditions through a series of topical questions aimed at smaller businesses and their advisers. The questions change each month.

This month, the surveys also found that involvement of smaller businesses in public procurement is still an issue. Recent efforts by the government to open up public-sector contracts to smaller businesses appear to have fallen well short of the mark. Of those who responded to the UKBB survey, 79 per cent said that government moves had either been 'not at all' or 'not very' successful compared to the situation five years ago.

Bank charges are also a focus of dissatisfaction. Since 2003, the UK's four largest banks have been required to make available to small and medium-sized enterprises an account that offered an interest rate of at least 2.5 percentage points below base, or free money transmission services, or both. But even with this requirement in place, only 11 per cent of UKBB and nine per cent of UKBAB respondents thought the charges were good value for money.

However, one shift in the banking landscape does not seem to have had much effect – the closure of branches. The number of bank and building society branches has fallen by nearly 11 per cent since 2002, but 80 per cent of respondents to the UKBB say this has not affected their businesses at all, or only very little.

The latest surveys also asked panellists about themselves, and which of their personality traits they thought had contributed most to their business success. The three traits that were rated most highly by both UKBB and UKBAB respondents were:

- Leadership skills
- Self-assurance
- Emotional stability

The lowest-rated traits were dominance, tough-mindedness and charisma.

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.

— Ends —

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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