



Using supply chains for social change

Buy Social Corporate Challenge

Year 9 Report Summer 2025



S Social
Enterprise UK

Year 9 in numbers

The headline figures behind the Buy Social Corporate Challenge

£656m

Total spend with social enterprises by corporate partners (years 1-9)

1,132

Approximate number of social enterprises supplying Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners in year 9

46%



Rise in spending with social enterprises

2,128

Approximate number of social enterprises supplying Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners (years 1-9)

£59.1m

Profit reinvested into social missions from trade with Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners (years 1-9)

5,959 JOBS



Created at social enterprises from trade with Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners (years 1-9)

33



High-profile companies buying from social enterprises

£179m

Total spend with social enterprises by corporate partners in year 9



What is the Buy Social Corporate Challenge?

Led by Social Enterprise UK in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the Buy Social Corporate Challenge was launched in Downing Street in April 2016.

The programme was set up to do two things:

1. help large businesses to engage with a range of innovative suppliers and embed sustainability and social value into their core operations.
2. help high-performing social enterprise suppliers to grow their revenues and impact by tapping into corporate purchasing power.

The core ambition behind the Buy Social Corporate Challenge is to support a group of high-profile companies to collectively spend £1 billion with social enterprises through their procurement.

Social enterprises are businesses which trade for a social or environmental purpose. They reinvest at least half of their profits to benefit people and planet, using commercial business models to transform lives and communities across the UK and around the world.

Many social enterprises operate a business-to-business (B2B) model. Increasing their traded revenue is a way to enhance their financial sustainability and scale up their impact.

Social Enterprise UK supports Buy Social Challenge Partners to source from social enterprises through a package of strategic engagement, supply chain review, training, internal and external communications, brokerage and events.

This report summarises the progress and impact of the programme in its ninth year (calendar year 2024) and the impact of the programme's first nine years as a whole.

The core ambition behind the Buy Social Corporate Challenge is to support a group of high-profile companies to collectively spend £1 billion with social enterprises through their procurement.

Meet Kat



It wasn't safe for Kat to stay in Ukraine when Russia invaded.

She was one of more than 200,000 Ukrainians welcomed to the UK.

But Kat still needed to work to support herself.

She's now the Bakery Manager at Half the Story, a social enterprise that supplies three Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners.

People like Kat are the whole point of the challenge, where supply chain contracts have a positive social impact.

Which companies are signed up?

The Buy Social Corporate Challenge began with seven partners in 2016 and now has 33, representing a wide range of industries.

Founding partners

Johnson & Johnson



Wates



Partners

Amey



CBRE



Deloitte.

DIAGEO



FRESHFIELDS



Linklaters



SIEMENS



How much trade is there between corporate partners and social enterprise suppliers?

This latest year saw the highest level of trade between social enterprise suppliers and Buy Social Corporate Challenge buyers since the programme launched.

Total spend with social enterprises by corporate partners in year 9 was £179 million.

This represents a 46% increase in social enterprise spend in year 9 compared with year 8.

The group of businesses is making good progress towards our long-term goal of £1 billion of procurement spend going to social enterprise suppliers.

In 2024, an estimated 1,132 social enterprises supplied products or services to Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners, a 14% increase on the corresponding figure the previous year.

Total spend with social enterprises by corporate partners in year 9

£179m

Total spend with social enterprises by corporate partners (years 1-9)

£656m

The goal: £1 billion of procurement spend with social enterprises

£1 billion

What Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners think about sourcing from social enterprises

88%



said it had created external recognition

94%

believed it had increased supplier diversity

59%

told us it had enhanced engagement within their procurement team

76%

thought it had brought innovation into their supplier base

69%

believe it had improved the environmental sustainability of their supplier base

65%

said it had raised awareness of the procurement function with their business leadership



100%

told us it had supported their business values and purpose

What products and services do social enterprises supply to the corporate partners?

There are an estimated 131,000 social enterprises across the UK.

An estimated 60% of these companies operate in the business-to-business (B2B) market.

In 2024, social enterprises delivered a wide range of products and services to Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners.



Category Area	Percentage
Education and skills development	18.2%
Consultancy and business support	16.5%
HR and employee wellbeing	10.8%
Facilities management	8.1%
Employment and career services	6.9%
Research	6.9%
Health care	6.7%
Community services	5.6%
Food and beverages	5.6%
Events	5.4%
Other	4.1%
Hospitality	1.6%
Creative industries	1.6%
Merchandise and corporate gifts	1.2%
IT and digital services	0.5%
Retail	0.3%
TOTAL	100.0%

How do social enterprises compare with other businesses on cost and delivery?

Social Enterprise UK research consistently shows that social enterprises trading with Buy Social Corporate Challenge clients are competitive on cost and the quality of product or service delivery.

The text '100%' is rendered in a large, white, sans-serif font on a magenta background. The two zeros are stylized to include black dots for eyes and a white curved line for a smile, giving the percentage a happy, personified appearance.

100% of corporate partners report that social enterprises deliver comparable or higher quality compared with other suppliers

The text '74%' is rendered in a large, white, sans-serif font on a cyan background.

74% of corporate partners report that social enterprises are cost neutral or cheaper when compared with other suppliers

What's in it for social enterprises?

The revenue and profit earned from corporate clients directly supports the core missions of B2B social enterprises.

Social Enterprise UK estimates that a total of £59.1 million of profit has been reinvested into social and environmental missions as a result of trade with Buy Social Corporate Challenge clients (years 1-9).

This profit was invested into a wide range of social and environmental missions. According to the latest State of Social Enterprise report, the top ten social or environmental missions of UK social enterprises are:

Social/environmental causes addressed by UK social enterprises:

1. supporting vulnerable people
2. improving physical health, mental health and wellbeing
3. creating employment opportunities
4. supporting other social enterprises/ organisations
5. addressing social exclusion
6. supporting disabled and neurodiverse people, and people with long-term health conditions
7. addressing the climate emergency
8. promoting education and literacy
9. addressing financial exclusion
10. providing affordable housing/ addressing homelessness

A wide range of other benefits were reported by social enterprises over the last 12 months, according to Social Enterprise UK's annual survey.

As can be seen, almost half of social enterprises working with our corporate partners reported a positive impact on employment. We estimate that 5,959 jobs were created or supported at social enterprises from trade with Buy Social Corporate Challenge partners.

58%

made changes to our marketing approach

63%

learned how to engage more effectively with corporates

46%

recruited more staff or secured existing positions

54%

secured new contracts with other companies from having corporates in our client list/references

50%

extended our range of products/services

54%

made changes to our products/services

What's next for the Buy Social Corporate Challenge?

When Social Enterprise UK launched the Buy Social Corporate Challenge in 2016, we decided to set ourselves an ambitious goal.

We saw great potential in the emerging social procurement market, but suspected it would take some time to reach our £1 billion target.

Our aim is to reach the target by 2026 and are confident this is achievable.



£1bn

This report captures progress up to and including 2024. The next annual report will include the total social procurement spend from 2016-2025. The final programme report (covering the full period from 2016-2026) will be released in 2027.

We have just two more reporting years to bridge the gap between £650m and £1bn.

How The Skill Mill works with Equans

Equans first encountered Social Enterprise UK member The Skill Mill at a Buy Social Corporate Challenge 'Meet the Supplier' event

The Skill Mill offers a wide range of services, including grounds maintenance, landscaping, and cleaning services. They only employ ex-offenders aged 16-18, actively reducing reoffending whilst increasing the engagement, employability and life chances of young people. Less than 8% of their employees reoffend, compared to the national rate of 64%.

Social Enterprise UK regularly organises 'Meet the Social Enterprise Supplier' events, which is where Equans, a global energies and services company which offers facilities management and maintenance services, saw a pitch by The Skill Mill.

Further conversations with their wider procurement team eventually led to The Skill Mill working on one of Equans' government contracts, providing repair and painting services for buildings and properties. The 16 young people employed for this were referred through the Norfolk Youth Justice Team. All had long histories of persistent and serious offending but 60% of the group progressed into further employment, of whom 12% created their own self-employment opportunities. There was only one reconviction in the group.

All of them achieved their CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] and Health and Safety at Work qualifications and AQA Level 2 Employability Skills qualifications.

"One of the key lessons Equans learned from this project is the exceptional dedication and commitment displayed by social enterprises, particularly The Skill Mill. We haven't always observed this level of dedication in commercial enterprises. The team's professionalism and high standard of service have been outstanding, as evidenced by excellent feedback from the client."

Karolina Mikolajczyk, Procurement Manager, Equans UK & Ireland.

"With Equans we developed mutual trust built on shared values, with open and transparent communication which ultimately converted into a strong business partnership. This generated significant social impact and commercial benefit not only for The Skill Mill and Equans but also for a range of secondary stakeholders."

David Parks OBE, Managing Director, The Skill Mill



BREAKING THE REOFFENDING CYCLE

8%

Less than 8% of The Skill Mill's employees reoffend, compared to the national rate of 64%.

"Equans learned about the dedication and commitment by social enterprises, particularly The Skill Mill. We haven't always seen this dedication in commercial enterprises."

Karolina Mikolajczyk, Procurement Manager, Equans UK & Ireland.

Onwards!

Using supply chains for social change

There are some fantastic results in this report, and we'd love to see more of the same next year. We encourage all our Buy Social Corporate Challenge buyers and suppliers to explore more potential opportunities for social procurement trade.

If you're a large company or social enterprise not yet trading to your full potential within the social procurement market, please get in touch to discuss how we can support you.



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