

# The Pulse Business CEO Index

*Tomorrow's vision for today's business*

OCT  
2020

## Investment Hopes Undimmed by Pandemic Disruption

Despite the challenges of managing restrictions that ebb and flow with the course of the COVID-19 pandemic – not to mention ongoing trading uncertainty around Brexit – UK business leaders remain optimistic about investment prospects at home and abroad, as their responses to our latest pulse reveal:

### Insights at a glance:

- There is plenty of confidence that investment will grow post-Brexit as the UK becomes an increasingly attractive prospect for countries facing major challenges of their own, closer to home
- The UK dominates investment expectations, with almost half of our CEO respondents declaring it their main focus of interest for 2021
- For businesses in some sectors the US, India and China present the most significant opportunities as they look to hedge their established investments

As businesses of every shape and variety navigate their own survive-and-thrive journeys through the COVID age, our snapshot of investment interest among UK CEOs anticipates a dedicated focus on home territory in 2021.

Perhaps this isn't surprising at a moment of peak uncertainty around the nature of post-Brexit trade deals – not only with Europe, but also globally. But while 49% of our respondents have their eyes firmly fixed on the domestic market there is considerable international interest in some sectors, with Europe, the US, China and India registering 11%. Australia and individual Asian countries including Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia also received specific mention.

### Rule Britannia

For some CEOs, the Brexit promise of free trade is central to their interest in the UK market. Others expect the UK to strengthen its position as an international investment target.

“I see great opportunity for the United Kingdom after its exit from the EU, and following a working vaccination for the Coronavirus,” says one respondent from the property sector. “The UK has historically been a strong trading country and when free to trade without the restrictions of EU Membership it can once again be a world beater.”

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This CEO adds: **“The UK is attractive to foreign investment, has an exemplary record of law, banking, quality made products, and inventions that built the modern world. The UK is a leading economy and has great esteem globally. With a renewed confidence (which will come) the potential for UK business is limitless.”**

A CEO from the technology sector notes an influx of investment from the Middle East, adding: **“The US is issuing new money at dangerously high levels [while] China has trade issues; the UK is looking like one of the safest places to invest during these challenging times.”**

Sector-specific matters qualify some expectations. The head of one energy business, for example, simply says: **“If the UK Government take the net zero agenda seriously, the opportunity is significant.”**

### Charitable interests

For organisations in the charity sector on the other hand, investment must be balanced with the scope of the business.

**“Our (registered) charitable objects specify UK beneficiaries,”** says a tertiary sector leader. **“We are not yet large enough to warrant surplus investment in assets. However, we continue to receive enquiries from the US in particular and are in dialogue regarding scope for the ‘franchise’ of our unique model of provision.”**

Another charity CEO also expresses a vote of confidence in the US, for its **“scientific leadership”**.

Meanwhile, the growing Indian market is being watched closely by decision makers in the renewables and business services sectors. One CEO declares: **“I have the strongest interest in Vietnam and India – and additional interest in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia.”**

If China is seen as a problematic source of investment by some business leaders, it remains a focal player in the minds of others, as a CEO from the catering and hospitality sector explains: **“Historic investment has often gravitated towards North America and Europe in recent years. However, as we face uncertain and turbulent times it seems suitable to seek to hedge investments.”**

The same CEO concludes: **“Asia as a whole has had more experience with pandemic and similar situations. China in particular is showing signs of opening up in certain areas and creating attractive investment propositions to hedge against existing investments.”**

The overwhelming conclusion is that despite the continuing impact of those troublesome twins – Brexit and COVID – on business strategy, the vision of CEOs remains open to the full potential of domestic and international investment. We can all take heart from their optimism.

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