STATE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

IN SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

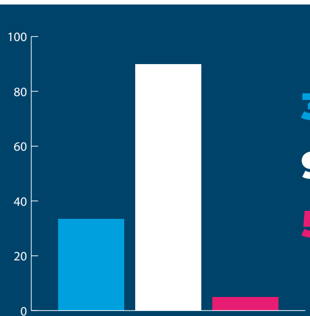
This paper sets out headline findings on the state of social enterprise in South East England, using government estimates and data from the State of Social Enterprise 2025 and SEUK's Social Enterprise Knowledge Centre.

Around 17,000 of the 100,000 social enterprises in the UK operate in South East England*. **53%** of these operate as Community Interest Companies.

Median social enterprise turnover in South East England was around **£67,500** in the previous financial year.

Social enterprises in South East England employ a **median of 6 people**.

Of the social enterprises surveyed:



34% deliver products

90% deliver services

5% deliver works

The main sources of income in the South East were trading with the **public sector (25%)**, trading with the **general public (23%)**, and **non-government, local authority, and public sector grants (13%)**.

The median amount of time social enterprises in the South East have been trading is 8 years.

	SE	UK
Up to 6 months	5%	3%
7 months to a year	1%	2%
1-3 years	22%	19%
4-5 years	13%	17%
6-10 years	31%	26%
11-15 years	10%	14%
16-20 years	5%	7%
More than 20 years	14%	11%

ECONOMY

46% developed a new product or service in the previous financial year. This represents a decline from **63%** in **2021** and **58%** in **2023**.

In 2025, the number of social enterprises developing new products and services was lower in the South East of England than the UK figure.

	PROFIT		LOSS		BROKE EVEN	
	SE	UK	SE	UK	SE	UK
2025	32%	40%	26%	26%	32%	28%
2023	45%	48%	30%	26%	22%	22%
2021	45%	49%	26%	25%	29%	25%

	SE	UK
2025	46%	50%
2023	58%	53%
2021	63%	61%

47% grew their turnover from the previous financial year.
24% decreased their turnover from the previous financial year.

58% expect their turnover to grow in the next financial year, and **13%** expect it to decrease.

Of those who expect their turnover to grow, most plan to achieve this through partnerships with the public/ private sector **(71%)**, developing new products/ services **(67%)**, and diversifying/ expanding into new markets **(61%)**.

Financial barriers were perceived as the biggest barrier to growth **(77%)**. Of these financial barriers, **obtaining grant funding** was viewed as the biggest barrier to growth **(80%)**.

Social Enterprise Knowledge Centre

Access The Foundation for Social Investment

BETTER SOCIETY CAPITAL

Social Enterprise UK

SOCIETY

56% of social enterprise leaders are women. This is slightly lower than the UK figure of **57%**.

9% are from a minority ethnic background. This is lower than the UK figure of **17%**.

26% are disabled or neurodivergent. This is lower than the UK figure of **30%**.

74% have lived experience of the social issue(s) addressed by their social enterprise

84% are real living wage employers

More than 70% of the workforce at Britain's Bravest Manufacturing Company (BBMC) are veterans, disabled, or both.

The **top three impact** areas for social enterprises in the South East are:

- Supporting vulnerable people **(50%)**
- Mental health and wellbeing **(43%)**
- Supporting other social enterprises/organisations **(34%)**.

SUPPORT

The proportion of social enterprises in the South East that have applied to external finance has decreased from **39%** in **2021** to **14%** in **2025**.

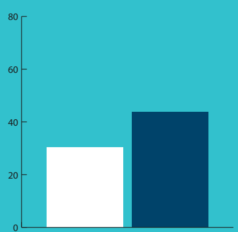
	2025	2023	2021
Applied for external finance	14%	19%	39%
Considered applying but didn't	30%	27%	20%
Not considered applying	56%	52%	41%
Don't know/prefer not to say	1%	2%	N/A

The three most common reasons for deciding not to apply to new sources of finance in 2025 were:

	2025
Time pressures/lack of resources prevented application	35%
Not the right time (economic conditions)	27%
Thought application would be rejected	23%

Opinions on external finance were as follows:

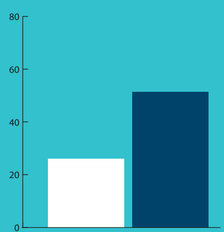
Forms of finance available are suitable for my organisation



30% Agree

43% Disagree

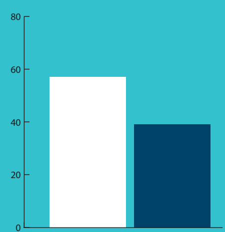
The amount of finance available for my organisation is sufficient



26% Agree

52% Disagree

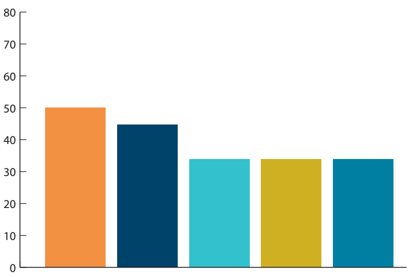
We have financial, marketing, and business skills required to obtain external finance and investment



57% Agree

39% Disagree

The five most common areas where external information/advice were sought were:



50% Business growth/business plans

45% Financial advice e.g. accounting, cash flow, general running of the business

34% Employment law/redundancies

34% Marketing

34% Training/skills needs

socialenterprise.org.uk

*Based on DCMS market trend data from 2023. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-enterprise-market-trends-2023/social-enterprise-market-trends-2023#Number-of-Social-Enterprises

Note on sample size – 88 social enterprises from the South East completed the 2025 SOSE survey.

Social Enterprise UK