



Roundtable Key Takeaways – Autumn 2025

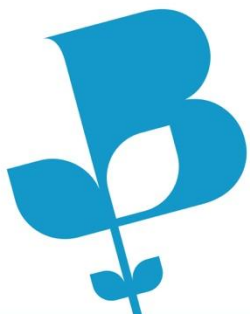
Across all roundtable discussions, several common themes and concerns have emerged. Below is a consolidated summary:

1. Support for Small Businesses

- SMEs continue to feel overlooked in favour of larger industry players.
- Calls for fairer taxation, including reforms to business rates, VAT, and National Insurance.
- Challenges include cash flow pressures, complex grant applications, and match funding requirements.

2. Skills Shortages & Workforce Development

- Widespread concern over the lack of skilled workers, particularly in tech and hospitality.
- Young people are often unprepared for the workplace, lacking life skills, discipline, and interview readiness.
- Employers report difficulty recruiting young people who are not “business-ready.”
- There is a strong desire for businesses to influence education and training, including curriculum design and apprenticeship support.
- Work experience remains a major barrier, with many young people struggling to access placements.
- Cadets are seen as a valuable talent pool, but collaboration between schools, employers, and cadet organisations is limited.
- College learners face challenges completing required work experience hours despite strong business links.
- Health and safety regulations restrict under-18s from gaining experience in manufacturing environments.



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3. Education & Inclusion

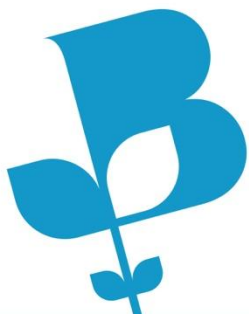
- Many children in Shropshire are outside mainstream education, disengaged from exposure to industry and potential work prospects.
- National recognition that the SEND provision is broken, impacting educational outcomes and career readiness.
- Care leavers need targeted support through work experience and apprenticeships.
- Employers are encouraged to be inclusive and supportive, especially for young entrants to the workforce.

4. Regulatory & Policy Challenges

- Businesses face rapid and unclear policy changes, particularly in environmental and export regulations.
- Employment legislation (e.g. Employment Rights Bill) is seen as burdensome for small employers.
- Careers advice for under-16s is rigid and lacks emphasis on sectors like construction and manufacturing.
- There is a call for government to review careers service contracts to better reflect industry needs.

5. Infrastructure & Local Economic Development

- Poor transport infrastructure and parking are limiting youth employment and town centre footfall.
- Towns in Shropshire are struggling with vacant units, pub closures, and a lack of vibrancy.
- The M6 and M54 link road is expected imminently, improving regional connectivity.
- Businesses are encouraged to explore partnerships with their local colleges to support local talent development.



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6. Cost Pressures

- Rising food costs, energy prices, and import/export fees are squeezing margins.
- Hospitality businesses are particularly affected by high spirit duty and VAT, with comparisons to lower rates in Europe.

7. Workplace Culture & Wellbeing

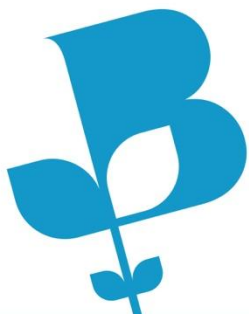
- More individuals are making career choices based on personal wellbeing.
- With an ageing population and rising retirement age, employers are urged to make roles more carer-friendly, though this is challenging in some sectors.
- Young people increasingly evaluate the values and culture of employers before applying.

8. Technology & Innovation

- AI is recognised as the most significant change facing businesses across all sectors.
- There is a need for industry-wide preparation and adaptation to AI's impact.

9. MP Engagement & Follow-Up

- MPs have committed to raising concerns with government departments and supporting local initiatives.
- There is a strong emphasis on collaboration between businesses, councils, and MPs to drive meaningful change, supported by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.



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