



# Business Barometer Q4 2024 Results

*State of trade update (October – December)*

# Overview and Summary

- This report summarises the findings from our Q4 Business Barometer poll, giving a flavour of how the horticulture and landscaping industry is currently faring.
- On average, HTA/APL members said that their sales were -8.1% behind where they had budgeted for Q4. Furthermore, members said that they were -13.8% behind their budgeted profit position at the end of Q4 2024.
- Amongst those behind their budgeted net profit position, most members (69%) said that they were expecting to pause planned investment into the business.
- Despite these challenges, many members said they still expected to invest in the business, with 40% of respondents looking to invest in new products/services and 38% planning to invest in new IT infrastructure and/or technology.
- Overall, short-term and long-term average business outlook was at its lowest level among non-landscaping members since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Q1 2020). Landscapers generally had a more positive business outlook than other HTA members.
- Considering the current challenges facing the sector, we include information on some of the projects (see page 13) HTA has been working on to support members, including the launch of the Plant Retail Success project and collaborating with FamilyBusiness UK to assess the consequences of the Autumn Budget inheritance tax changes.
- **Read on for the headline splits by business type and find out what support is available through the HTA**

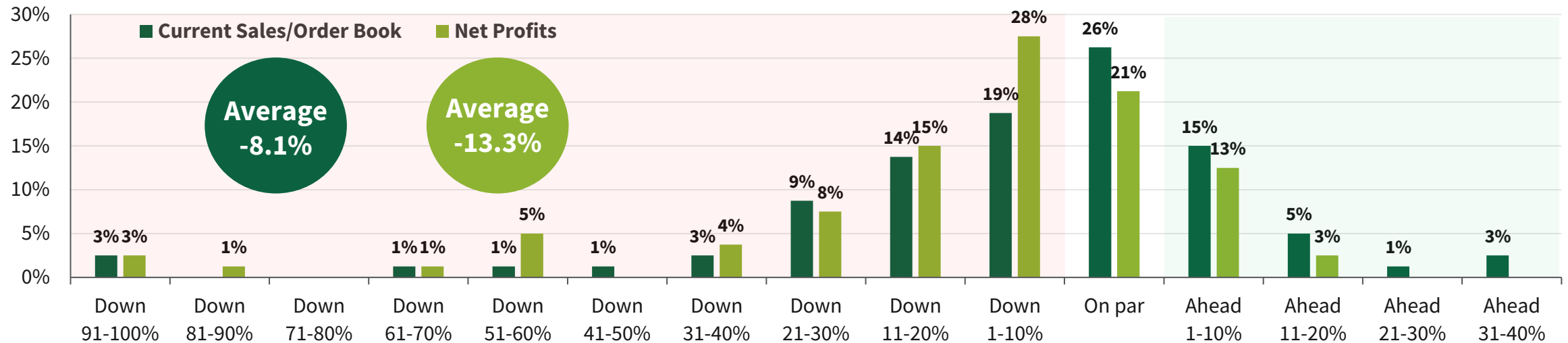
# Q4 2024 Sales and Net Profit (Budgeted v Actual)

## All HTA & APL Members

Members were asked whether they were ahead, behind, or on-par with their expected profit position and expected sales position at the end of Q4 2024. Respondents were most likely to say that sales were on par with expectations, but that profit positions were behind by 1-10%.

On average, members said that they were behind expected sales by -8.1%, and behind their expected profit position by -13.4%.

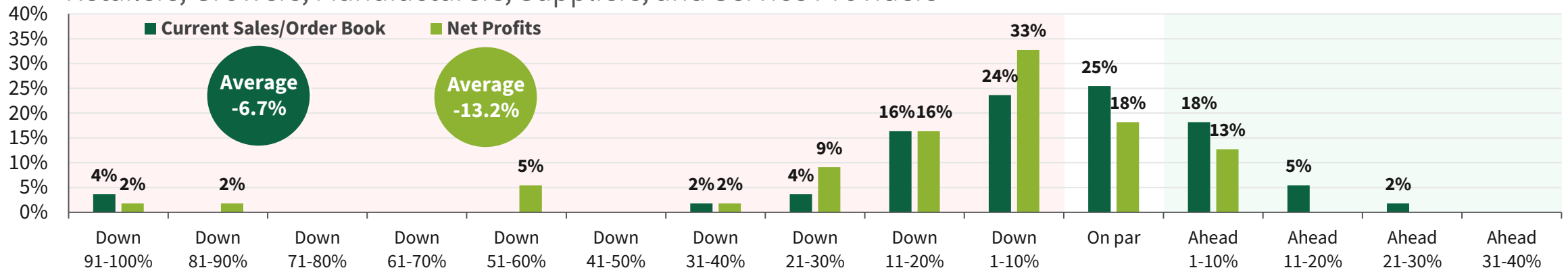
Although the average expected sales and profit positions were down, 50% of respondents said that they had met their expected sales target in Q4 2024, while 36% said that they had been on-par with or ahead of their expected profit position.



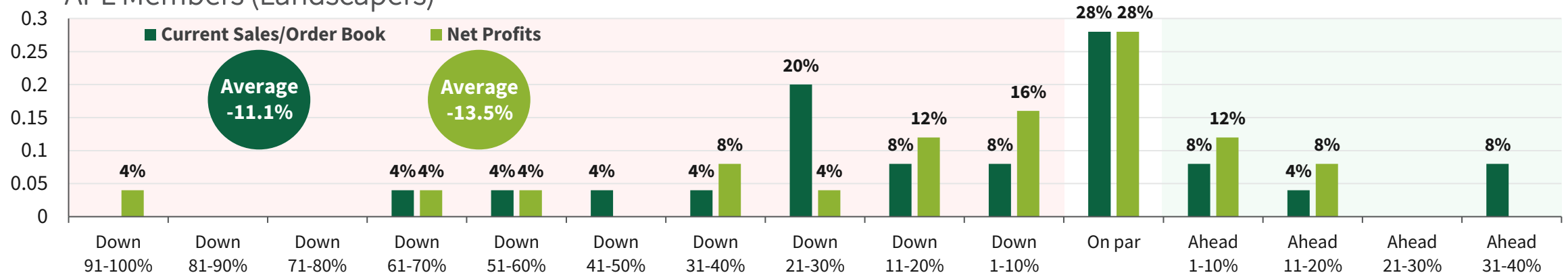
Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025); Base: 80 member businesses;  
 Note: Averages calculated using median value from responses.

# Q4 2024 Sales and Net Profit (Budgeted v Actual)

Retailers, Growers, Manufacturers, Suppliers, and Service Providers



APL Members (Landscapers)



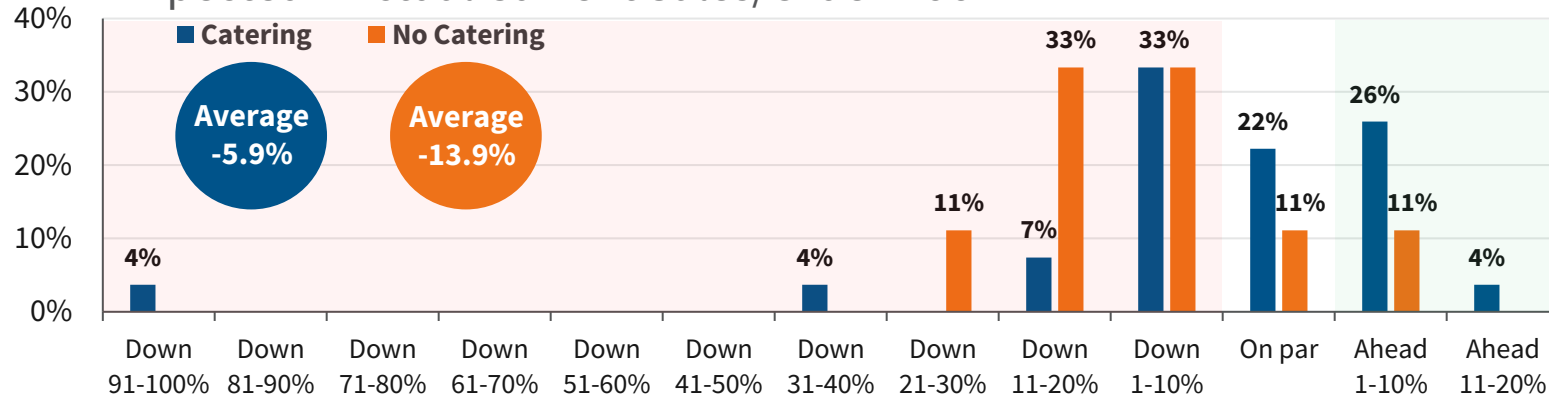
Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025); Base: 80 member businesses

Note: Averages calculated using median value from responses.

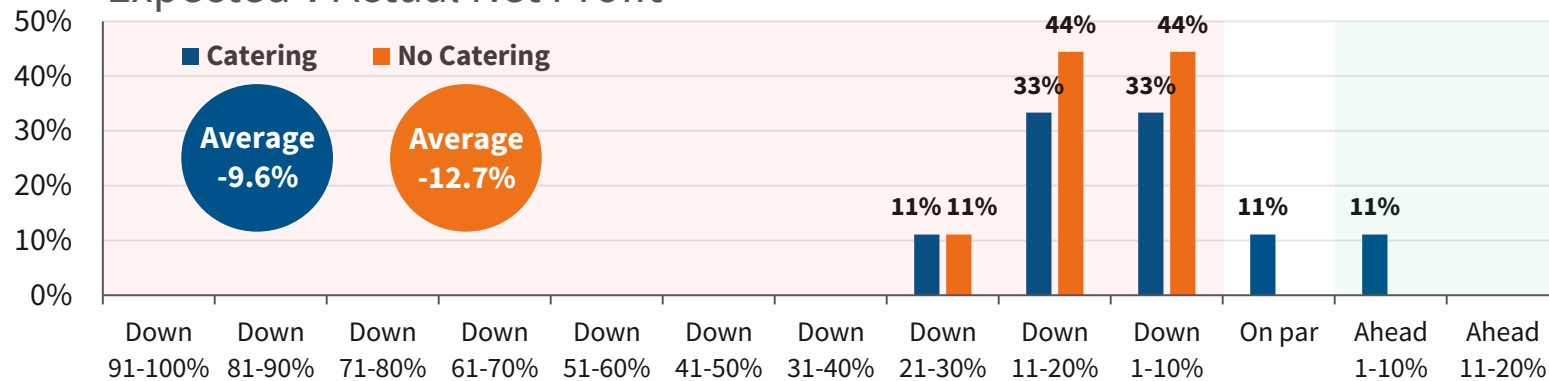
# Q4 2024 Sales and Net Profit (Budgeted v Actual)

Comparing retailers with/without catering

Expected v Actual Current Sales/Order Book



Expected v Actual Net Profit



Among retailers who responded to the Q4 survey, 75% had a café or restaurant as part of their business. From our January edition of Market Update, we know that catering performed well throughout 2024 (annual sales were up +11% compared to 2023).

The strong performance of garden centre catering was reflected in sales positions being notably stronger for retailers with a café/restaurant, with 52% of respondents having been on target or ahead of expected sales in Q4 2024.

22% of retailers with a café also said that they had been on par or ahead of their expected profits in Q4 2024. Conversely, all retailers without a café/restaurant said that they had been behind their expected profit position.

While expected sales were notably stronger among retailers with catering, the divide was less clear when looking at expected profit, with most retailers having struggled in this regard, even if they did have a cafe.

Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025);

Base: 36 member retailers

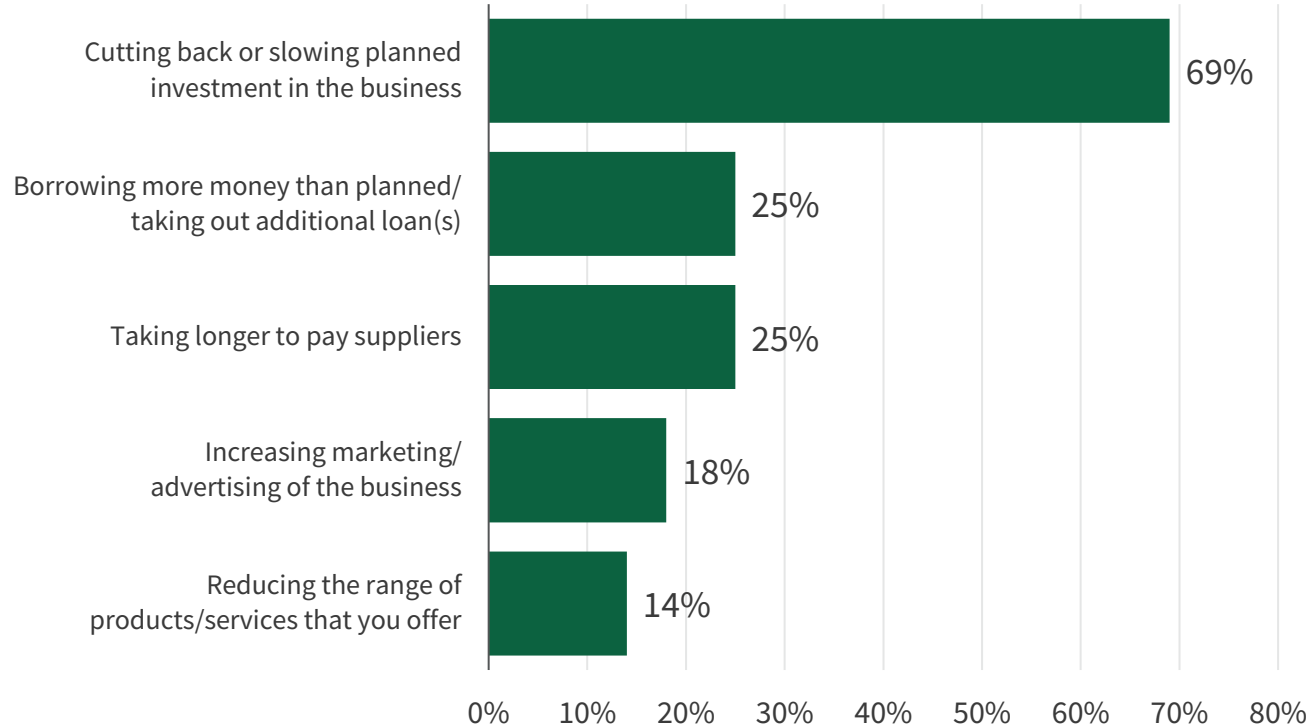
Note: Averages calculated using median value from responses.



# Impacts of profit positions behind budgets

Actions to be taken in the next 12 months

**“Is your business likely to be taking any of the following measures as a result of your profit position?”**



Businesses who said that their profit position was behind budget were asked what measures they would be likely to take as a result.

Most businesses said that they were being forced to cut-back or reduce planned investment into the business (69%).

Furthermore, a quarter said that they would be borrowing more money or at risk of taking longer to pay their suppliers.

Only 18% of members behind their budgeted profit position said that they had planned to increase spending on their marketing/advertising as a result.

Altogether, members behind their budgeted net profits are generally looking to stabilise their business' financial position rather than focussing on growth.

Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025);  
Base: 51 member businesses

# Business investment plans

## Over the next 12 months

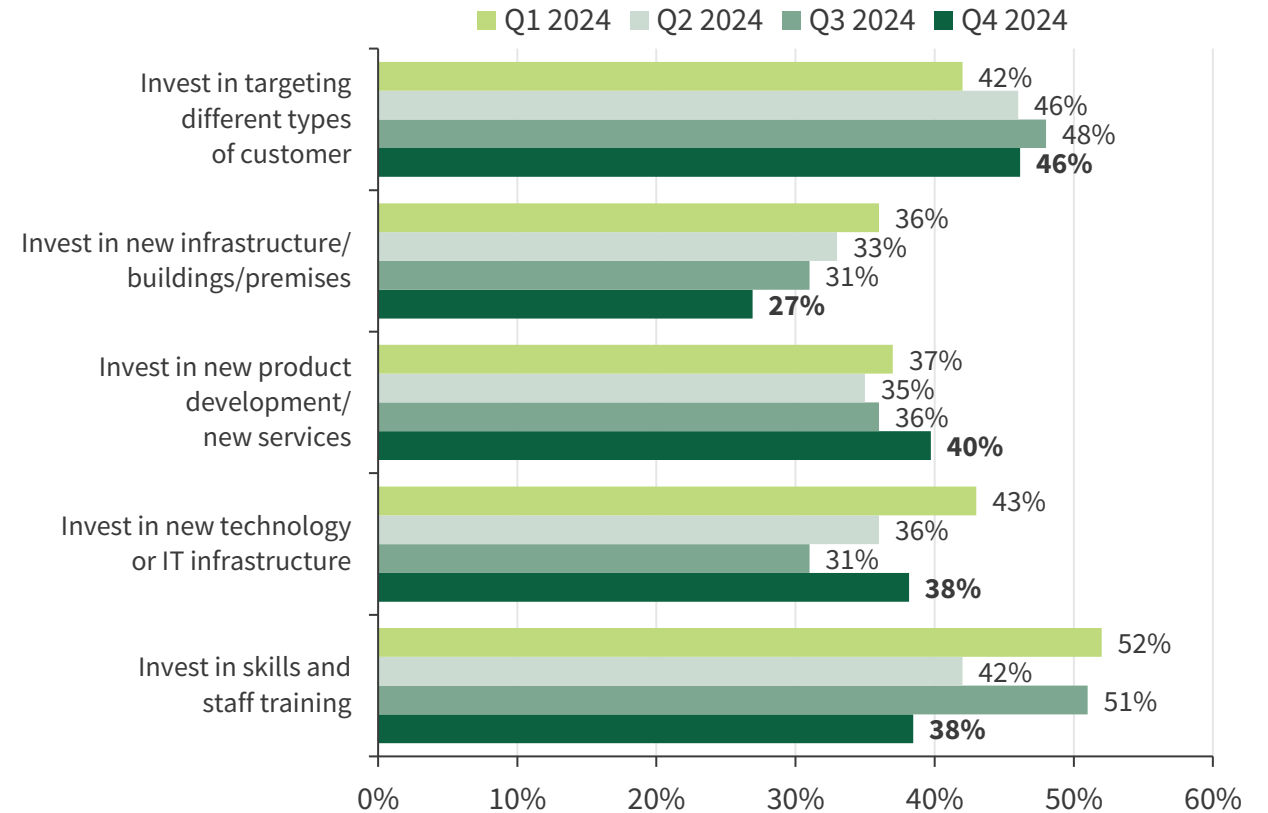
With net profits largely behind budgets, many members indicated that they were being forced to scale back planned investment compared to previous quarters in 2024.

In Q4, the likelihood of members investing in infrastructure (27%) was at its lowest point across 2024, although within the margin of error from previous surveys. Planned investment in employee training (38%) also fell notably from Q3, but this fall was not statistically significant and so is within margins of error with survey research. This continues the trend of businesses having to cut investments in the face of squeezed profits.

On the other hand, 38% of members said that they planned to invest in new technology or IT infrastructure: a rise of 7% on Q3 2024. But due to margins of error, we should assume investment is around about the same level if not slightly up.

Moreover, 40% of members said that they planned to increase investment in new products and services, while 46% said that they planned to invest in reaching new audiences with their products. This further suggests an interest in members increasing short-term turnover whilst postponing long-term investment, in attempt to boost sales and profits.

“In the next 12 months, how likely do you think it is that your business will do the following?”; % likelihood (scored a 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-pt scale where 7 is ‘extremely likely’)



Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025);  
Base: 78 HTA & APL member businesses

# Business Outlook

HTA Retailers, Growers, Manufacturers, Suppliers, and Service Providers

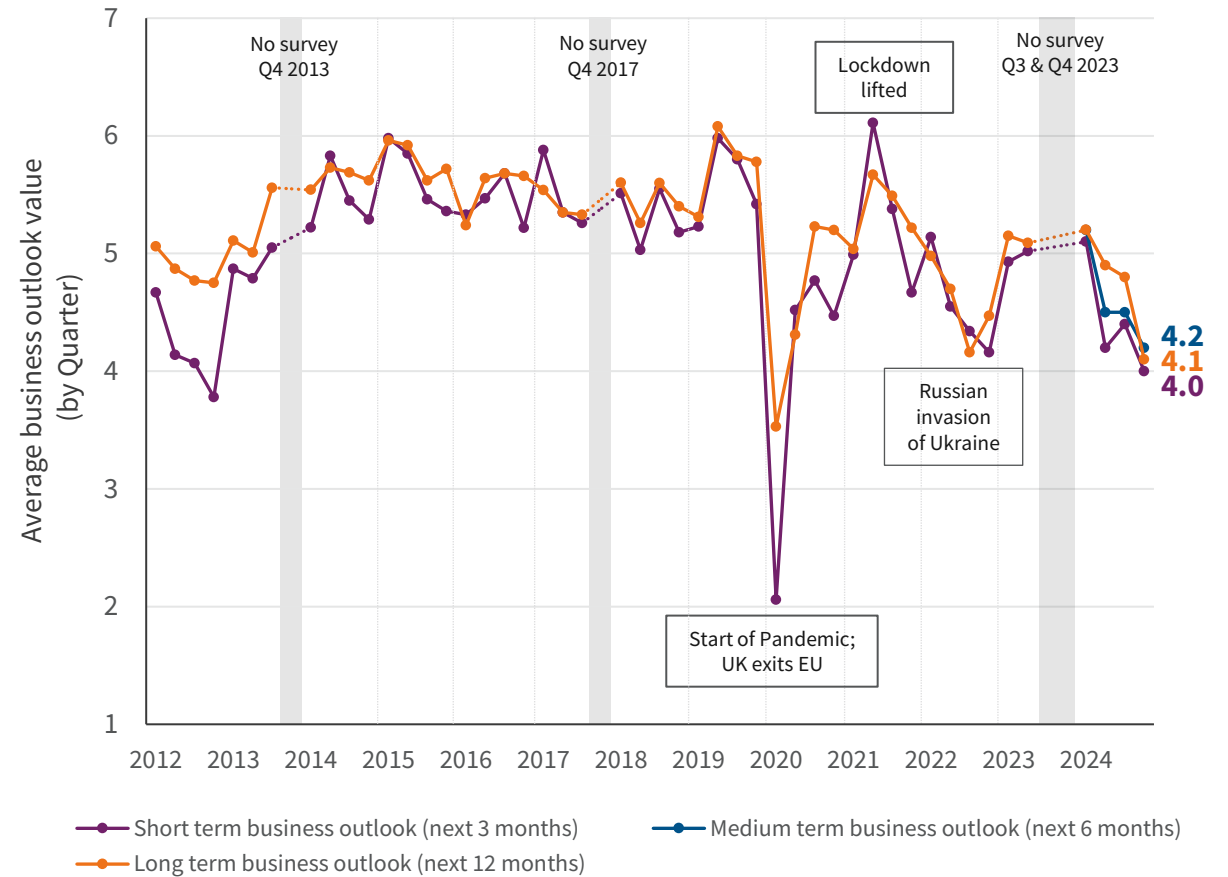
Following the end of Q4 2024, the average long-term and short-term business confidence among non-landscaper HTA members was at its lowest since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, despite a strong Christmas sales period (as reported in the January 2025 Market Update).

Across the 7-point scale, members answered on average a value of 4.0 for the short term – a neither positive nor negative business outlook. Long-term outlooks were roughly equal (4.1), highlighting the cautious business outlook in the short-term and long-term.

28% of members said that they had a positive business outlook for the short term, whereas 37% said that they had a more positive long-term outlook.

Since we started running the business barometer survey (previously ‘Member Voice’; running from 2012), there had been a trend of short-term business confidence falling between Q3 and Q4 among non-landscaping HTA members. These declines are not statistically significant in isolation; however, this seasonal trend is worth considering when interpreting members’ business outlook.

**HTA member average business outlook  
(1 = very negative, 7 = very positive)**



Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025); Base: 55 HTA Members



# Business outlook

## APL Members

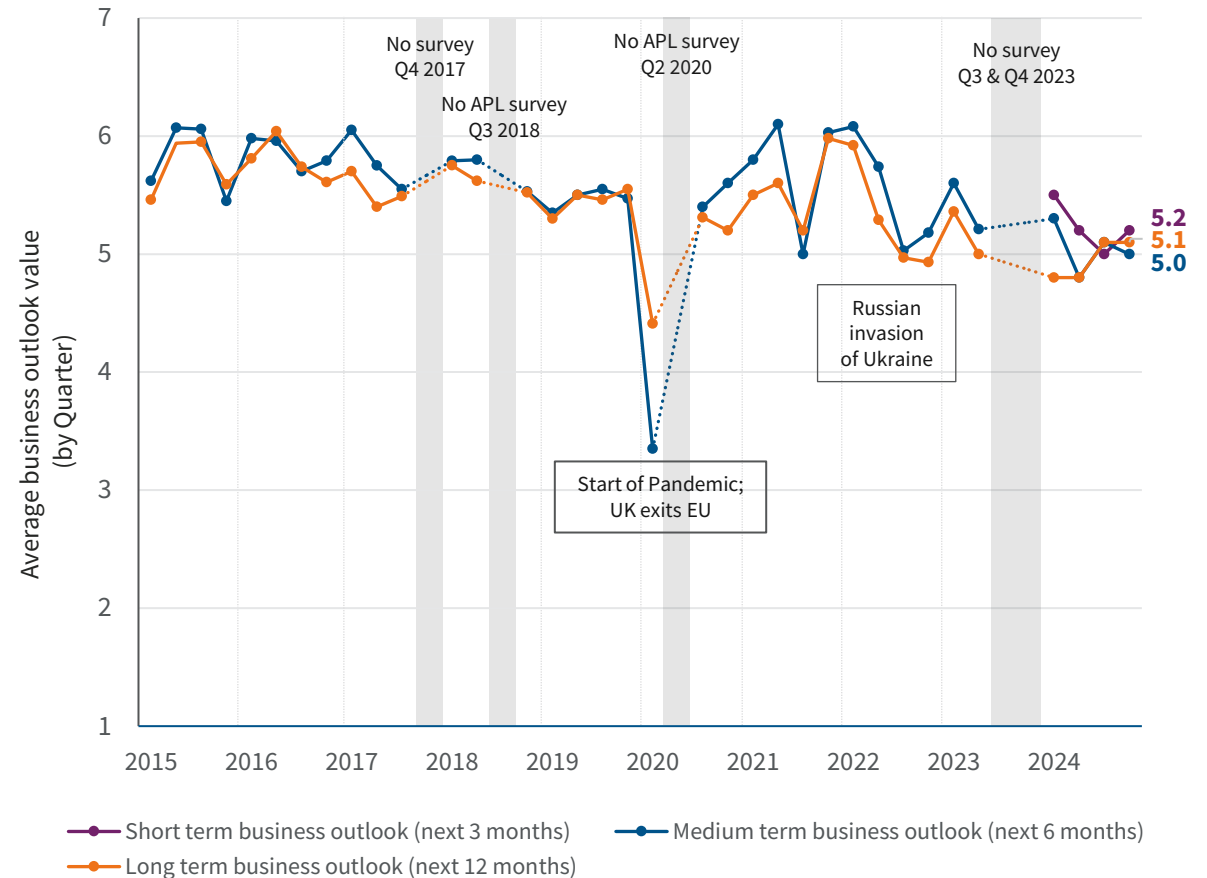
Among APL members, business confidence remained relatively positive, particularly compared against other HTA members. On average, long-term (5.1) and short-term (5.2) business outlooks had been at least a whole point on the 7-point scale higher than other HTA member businesses; but in the time series going back to 2015 confidence is historically low.

Compared to Q3 2024, short-term and long-term business confidence had been stable among APL members (both around 5/7).

68% of landscapers said that they had a positive short-term outlook on the state of business.

Longer-term, this fell slightly to 58% of landscapers with a positive outlook, although over half of all landscapers still gave positive responses for their long-term outlook.

APL member business outlook  
(1 = very negative, 7 = very positive)



Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025); Base: 25 APL member businesses

# Landscapers' Capacity for New Jobs

## APL Members

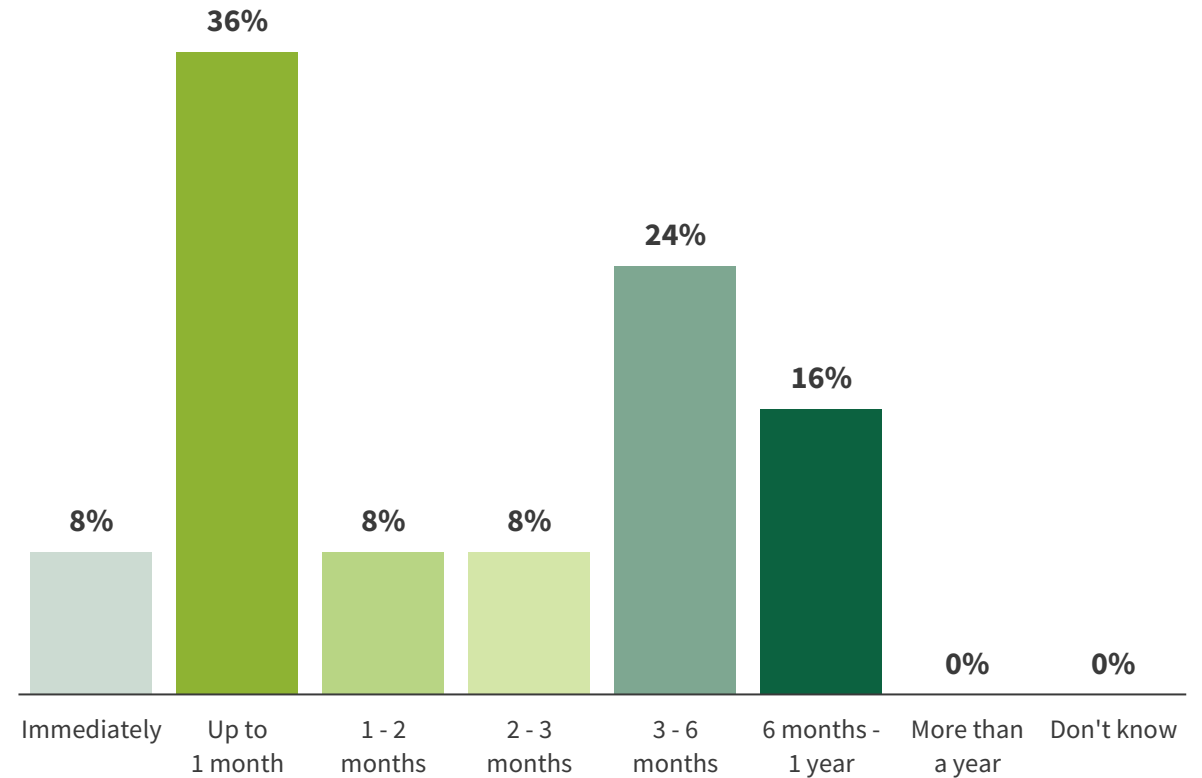
APL members were most likely to say that they had the capacity to take on new jobs in 1 months' time (36%).

This marks a change from Q3, where most landscapers (29%) said that they wouldn't be able to take on more work for 3-6 months. It's possible that this indicates a possible slowing of demand for landscaping work, but it's more likely a product of seasonality, with the Winter a quieter period for garden projects.

However, 24% of landscapers said that they were booked up for the next 3-6 months, and a further 16% said that they would be unable to take on more work for the next 6-12 months.

Only 8% of landscapers said that they could start a new job immediately, which is broadly in keeping with previous surveys.

### Lead-time for starting new jobs



Source: HTA & APL Business Barometer Q4 2024 (January 2025); Base: 25 APL member businesses

# HTA Support and Actions

## What resources are available to members?

HTA understands the current state of the market is very challenging for members. The below information covers just a few examples of the support available to members:

At the end of January, we launched the [Plant Retail Success initiative](#), bringing together new and existing materials to help support retailers improve commercial performance in the plant area. When plants sell and are merchandised successfully alongside linked products, the entire supply chain benefits. Resources include e-learning, consumer insights, and practical guidance.

The HTA is also working with **FamilyBusiness UK** and the CBI to provide evidence to government on the damaging consequences of the Autumn Budget's inheritance tax changes to our sector. **A survey** is currently in the field and is available to complete until **March 2<sup>nd</sup>**. Please do take part if you are able to, as from the data collected CBI will develop an economic impact assessment to assess the cost of the changes to businesses, jobs, and the wider economy.

Alongside this, we continue to lobby the government over the current cost of doing business, including organising MP visits to member businesses. If you have an interest in hosting your local MP at your business—regardless of their party affiliation or seniority visits are very beneficial—please get in touch via [policy@hta.org.uk](mailto:policy@hta.org.uk). We are also actively increasing media coverage for the industry, with recent contributions featured in [the Telegraph](#) and [the Financial Times](#) highlighting the challenges facing our sector.

We are also running regular [Town Halls and surgeries](#), led by our Policy Team. The aim of these sessions is to highlight and explain new legislation that may affect your business. Recent sessions have covered retail crime, the Autumn Budget changes, and border regulations.

Lastly, in 2025 we've expanded our [Regional Member Events](#), after a successful launch last year. These events are free to attend and allow businesses the opportunity to collaborate and share ideas, whilst hearing from industry experts on a wide range of topics.



# Sample Overview

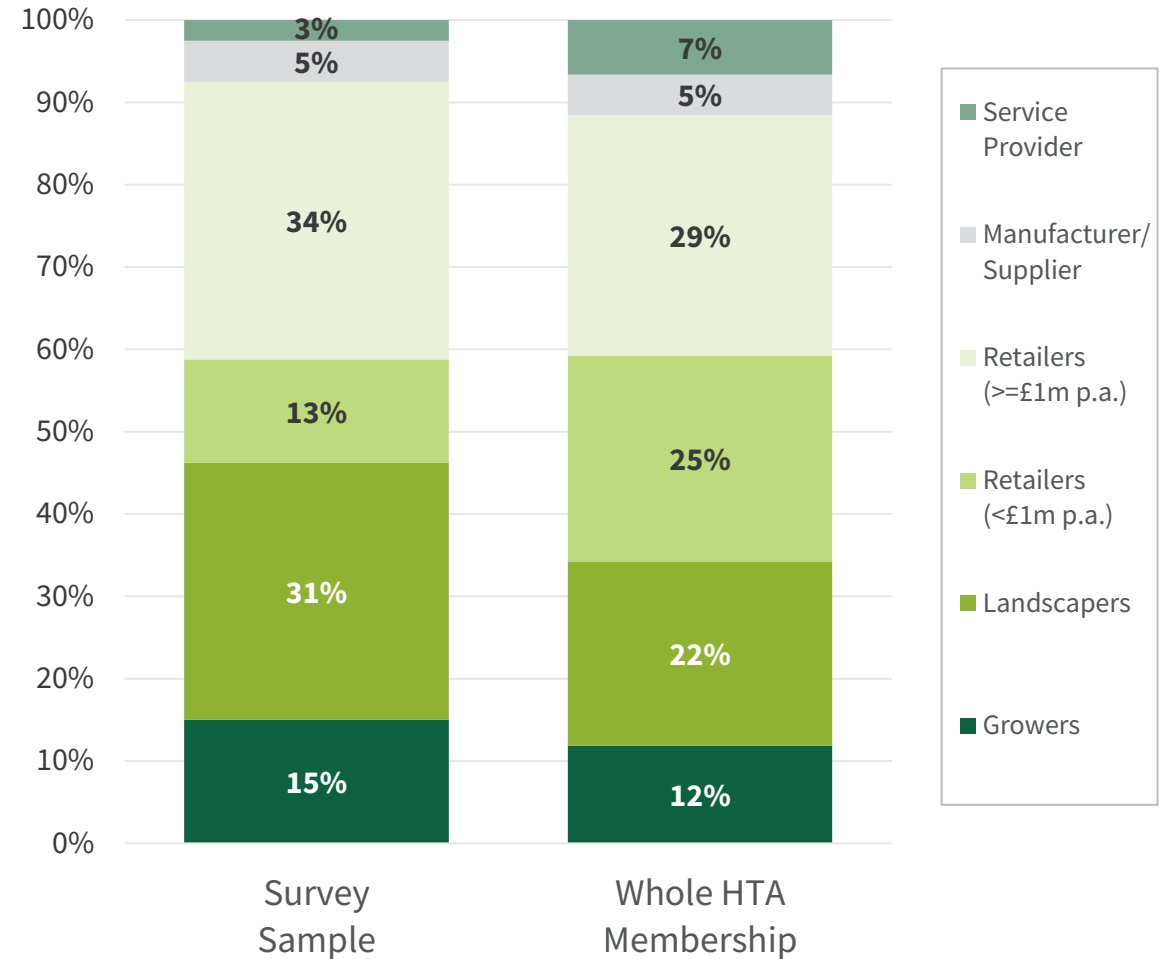
## Who participated?

Our Q4 Business Barometer survey received 80 responses from HTA and APL member businesses. Therefore, findings in this report should be treated as indicative, and not statistically robust.

The proportion of respondents to the business barometer survey were broadly representative of the overall HTA membership. Growers and landscapers were slightly overrepresented among survey respondents, whilst retailers were somewhat underrepresented.

Of these retailers, those with an annual turnover below £1m per annum were the most underrepresented group among survey responses.

To mitigate the effects of over- and under-representation, insights were split by business type where possible. This helps ensure findings are accurate and representative of the HTA's different membership segments.





# Closing Comments

## Get in touch

We hope you enjoyed our State of Trade update covering Q4 2024. If you have any questions, or would like to see something else included, please get in touch at:



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