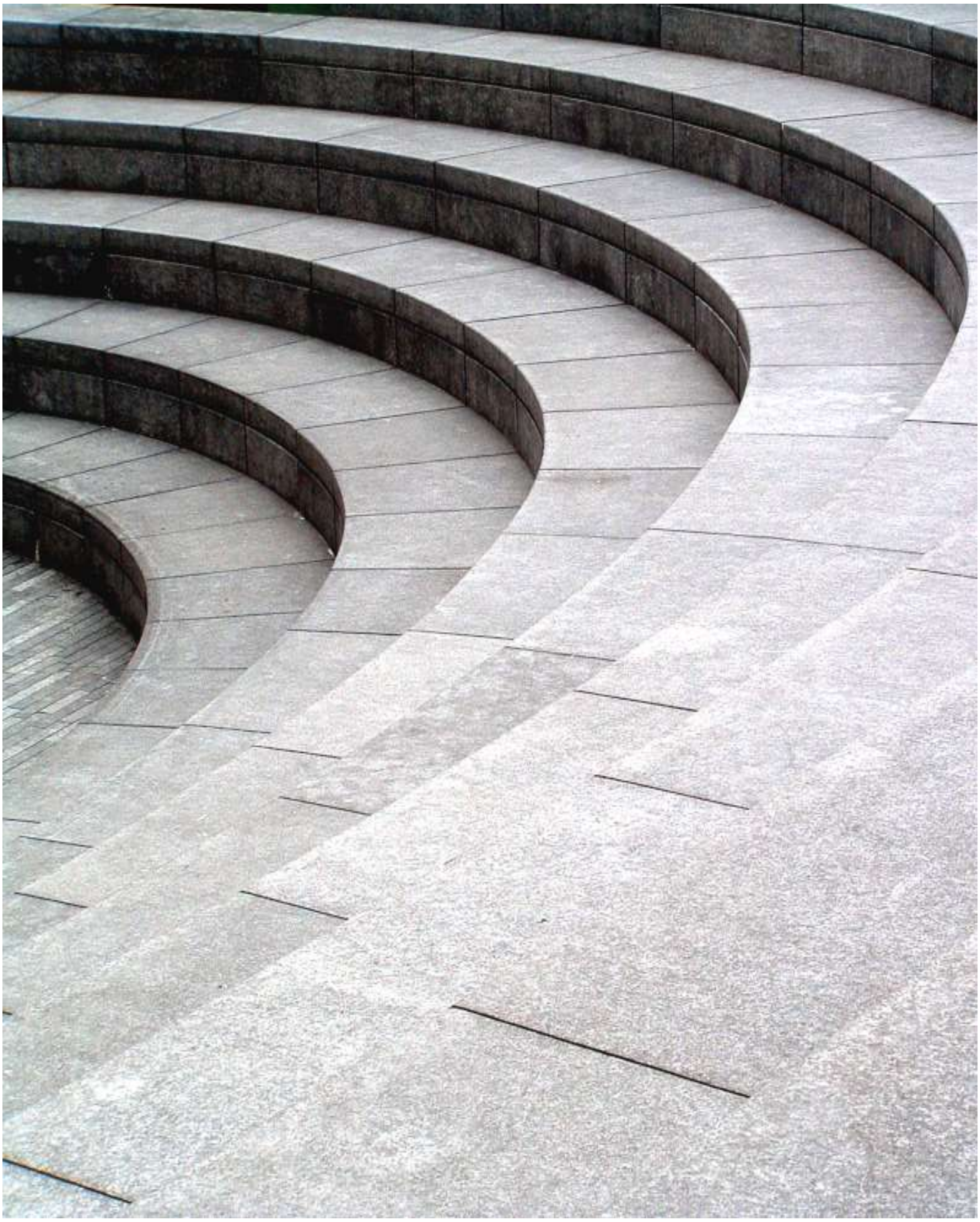
How to get back in the game - UK plc



At our last CEO lunch of the year, the guests generally hailed from the energy, natural resources and infrastructure sectors. We took a quick poll to see if people felt more optimistic about next year. The vote was a slight tilt towards 2026 being more positive, with international markets having greater potential. In light of this, we asked our guests:

What are the key growth catalysts needed for 2026 and beyond?

Below are five key takeaways from the discussion:

- There is strong sentiment that the UK Government needs to build business credibility (fast), increase investor confidence and provide stability through more coherent economic, energy and industrial policies. For example, water was highlighted as a critical enabler for growth in housing, data centres and industry, yet largely absent from the UK's industrial strategy (unlike in other countries).

- The importance of leadership and decisive industrial strategy to overcome national "frozen indecision" was highlighted. This is in contrast with the likes of China, USA, Taiwan who fund winning technologies, reduce red tape and enable is startling.

- New thinking and innovative working frameworks can be learnt from competing countries and applied to the UK. The US government is increasingly appointing industry (private sector) domain experts into key government roles, to close the gap between policy leadership, market understanding and strategic priorities.

- Consensus emerged around the need to nurture domestic skills, proactively support and better leverage British innovation, which remains world class in niche areas. Also, the need to retain (or claw back) more control over strategic national assets is required to tackle long term cost and geopolitical implications.

- The potential impact of AI can be both a major disruptor, especially for service-based economies, but at the same time a positive catalyst in providing enhanced energy and operational efficiencies. Caution should be taken so that AI is not over hyped, and the key to success will be its correct application.

Conclusions

The UK holds substantial untapped potential, and leaders can do far more to strengthen the economy through a structured, pragmatic approach to enabling growth. While the foundations are in place, they require focused attention to ensure relevance in an increasingly fast-changing world. For organisations to scale domestically and succeed internationally, they must be supported by an environment that enables innovation, competitiveness, and long-term resilience. It is essential that decision makers take note and act accordingly.

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