Question 3: Business Responsibility

Prove you can argue: a real position on stakeholder responsibility, a mechanism from your own context, and an honest limit.

200	3	2	Free
WORD LIMIT	BEATS TO COVER	WORKED EXAMPLES	TO READ & DOWNLOAD

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES.
All examples below are invented, to show technique. Yours must be real and defensible at interview.

01 SECTION 1

What this question actually asks

The question. "What responsibilities do you think businesses have to people other than their shareholders?" In no more than 200 words.

This is the one question in the Statement that is not about you at all. It is an opinion question, testing whether you can hold and defend a position on a real debate in business ethics, the kind the enterprise challenge inside the Leadership Programme will actually put you through. There is no "correct" answer the Trust is looking for. There is a wrong way to answer it: vaguely, with no position, hedging between every stakeholder group so as to offend no one.

What a strong answer actually does

ELEMENT	WHAT IT SHOWS
A clear position	You can commit to a view rather than listing every stakeholder equally
A real example or mechanism	You are not reciting an abstract theory you read once

ELEMENT	WHAT IT SHOWS
An acknowledged limit	You understand that responsibility to non-shareholders has to be weighed against something, not treated as unlimited

Word plan at 200 words. Your position, stated directly, around 40 words. The mechanism or example that supports it, around 110 words. The limit or trade-off you acknowledge, around 50 words.

02 SECTION 2

Writing it, beat by beat

State a position, around 40 words

Open with your actual view, in one or two sentences. Do not open by listing the full set of stakeholder groups, employees, suppliers, communities, the environment, as if naming them is the answer. Naming them is the preamble to the answer.

> ***Weak:*** *"Businesses have responsibilities to many stakeholders including employees, customers, suppliers, communities and the environment, and must balance all of these interests."*
> ***Strong:*** *"A business's responsibility to non-shareholders should be judged by whether it could sustain its operating model if the people it affects most could see the full consequences of it."*

Support it with a mechanism or example, around 110 words

Use something you have actually seen, in your sector or your country, rather than a textbook case study everyone else will also reach for. A specific mechanism, a wage floor, a supply-chain audit, a community consent process, is more convincing than a general appeal to "doing the right thing".

Acknowledge the limit, around 50 words

The strongest answers show you understand that unlimited responsibility to non-shareholders is not a serious position either: a business that cannot sustain itself serves no one. Say briefly how you would decide where the responsibility ends, or what happens when obligations to different groups conflict.

03 SECTION 3

Two worked examples

All examples are invented, to show technique.

Example A: supply chains and informal labour

> *A business's responsibility to non-shareholders should be judged by whether it could sustain its operating model if the people most affected by it could see the full consequences. For a manufacturer sourcing from informal suppliers, that means knowing, and disclosing, the working conditions two tiers down its own supply chain, not only at the contracts it signs directly.*
> *In my sector, the clearest mechanism for this is independent supply-chain audits with published results, not self-reported compliance, since self-reporting predictably understates harm at the tiers furthest from head office.*
> *This responsibility has a limit. A business that absorbs every social cost in its supply chain regardless of its own viability protects no one once it collapses. The honest position is that responsibility extends as far as transparency and a credible plan to improve conditions over time, not as far as unlimited absorption of every externality.*

Example B: platforms and gig workers

> *Businesses that structure their core operations around a class of workers should owe that class the same floor of protection they would owe direct employees, regardless of the contractual label attached to the relationship. The responsibility follows the economic dependence, not the paperwork.*
> *In practice this means a minimum income floor and basic injury cover for platform workers who derive the majority of their income from one platform, a mechanism several markets have now tested and shown to be financially viable at moderate cost.*
> *The limit is genuine flexibility: a worker who uses a platform occasionally alongside other income should not trigger the same obligations as one who depends on it entirely. Responsibility should scale with dependence, not apply as a flat rule regardless of it.*

Dos and don'ts

Do

- State an actual position in the opening sentences
- Support it with a real mechanism or example from your own sector or country
- Acknowledge a genuine limit or trade-off
- Write as if you expect to be asked to defend this at interview, because you might be

Don't

- List every stakeholder group with equal weight and call that an answer
- Reach for the most famous textbook case study rather than something you have seen
- Claim responsibility to non-shareholders is unlimited
- Avoid taking a position for fear of sounding one-sided

05 SECTION 5

Common mistakes, and the fix

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
A list of stakeholder groups with no position	Reads as a definition, not an argument	State what you actually think in the first sentence
A famous case study with nothing of your own	Shows you can recall, not that you can reason	Use a mechanism or example from your own context
No acknowledged limit	Reads as naive about how businesses actually operate	Say where the responsibility ends and why
Pure business-school jargon with no concrete content	Sounds rehearsed rather than reasoned	Replace abstractions with one specific mechanism

06 SECTION 6

Checklist

- A clear position stated in the opening sentences
- A real mechanism or example, not a textbook case study
- A genuine limit or trade-off acknowledged
- You could defend this position if challenged at interview
- Under 200 words