



the
policy
year
& achievements
2008



Federation of Small Businesses

The UK's Leading Business Organisation



Picture - Maxine Beuret

- The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) is the UK's leading lobby organisation representing the self-employed and owners of small businesses. Founded in 1974, it now has over 215,000 members across all industries, trades and services. It is a non-party political lobby group that exists to promote and protect the interests of all those who own and manage their own businesses.

Small Business Statistics

- There are over 4.7 million businesses in the UK
- Of that 4.7 million, 3.4 million are sole proprietors
- Over 99 per cent of all businesses in the UK employ less than 50 people
- Small and medium sized businesses employ 13.5 million people (59 per cent of the private sector workforce)
- Turnover from small and medium firms totals £1,440 billion (51.5 per cent) of UK GDP
- Over 60 per cent of all commercial innovations come from small businesses

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introduction



It has been a tough year for small businesses, with the onset of the global economic downturn affecting all of our members. The FSB's Press and Policy teams have been busy working on behalf of the members and the entire small business community, to ensure small firms get the support they need in order to help to pull the economy out of a recession.

The FSB's biggest achievement of 2008 was getting the government to announce a £1 billion loan fund for small businesses to help them through the downturn. Following a year in which more and more small businesses were seeing the availability of finance decrease and the cost of taking out loans and overdrafts dramatically increase, we came to an impasse with the banks. Despite enormous bailouts for the biggest clearers, FSB surveys showed that small businesses were still having trouble getting access to finance from the banks, so we took action in calling for a small business survival package – a blueprint for helping small businesses through the downturn.

Our high-profile campaign included full page adverts in national and regional newspapers, calling for a £1 billion fund, which we then received in Chancellor Alistair Darling's Pre-Budget Report.

Another significant campaign for the FSB this year has been Keep Trade Local – a call to shoppers, politicians, policy-makers and other businesses to support their local shops and keep the country's high streets alive. Some key achievements include 50,000 signatories to the FSB petition on the No.10 website, making progress with local authorities which agreed to pay small businesses within 20 days, making public procurement contracts more straightforward for small business to apply for; and promoting business rate relief for small firms.

Lobbying remains a team effort with members and staff at all levels of the organisation working together to get politicians and legislators to pay attention to the concerns and aspirations of the UK's small business sector. Sometimes we get quick and prominent wins, and sometimes we lobby for years before we see a change. This publication pays tribute to the work and achievements across the whole FSB, from the devolved regions to Westminster and Brussels including the Area Policy Units and the Regions and Branches across the UK.

This annual publication was produced by Sophie Kummer, Senior Press Officer in the FSB's London Office. If you would like to receive more information about our lobbying and media activities, sign up to the Weekly Brief, by sending a blank email to weeklybrief@fsb.org.uk and include the word 'subscribe' in the subject line.

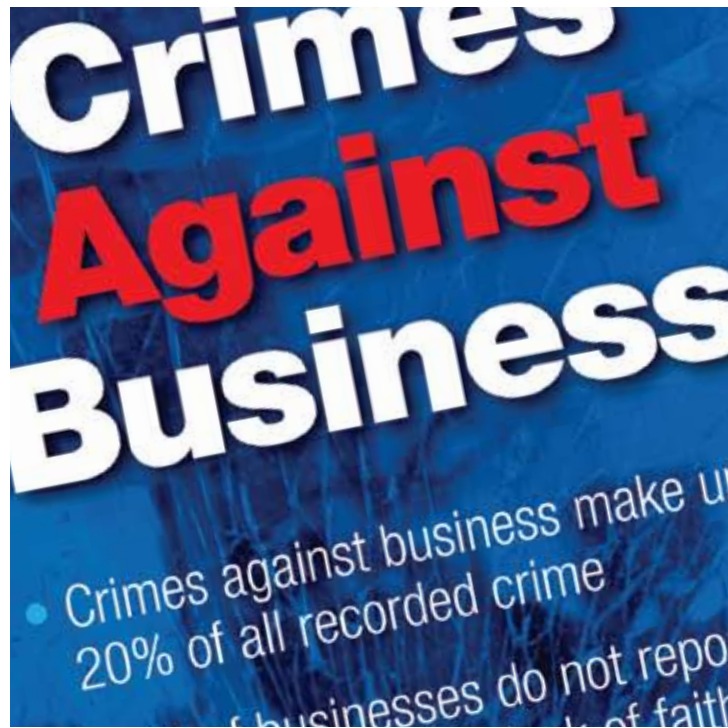
John Walker

John Walker
Federation of Small Businesses Policy Chairman

The FSB's lobbying accelerated a gear in 2008, raising awareness of our status as the UK's leading business organisation, increasing our visibility in the media and our ability to influence at the highest level of government. In a difficult year, with small businesses facing increasing financial challenges, we achieved some significant victories influencing policy at a time when small businesses need it most.

Throughout the year, staff and members of the FSB in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brussels, work behind the scenes to influence Members of Parliament, industry leaders, civil servants, opinion formers and journalists. They build networks and contacts and run campaigns in order to ensure that FSB policies are heard, understood and implemented. Sometimes we win immediate victories. More often, we put on the pressure for months and even years using every tool we have, to represent the interests of small businesses and achieve the support they need to thrive.

As the economic downturn began to bite towards the end of the year our policy work and policy wins, as well as media hits started to increase. The following pages outline the FSB's major achievements and ongoing policy work during 2008.



Media coverage

National total	87
Print	78
Broadcast	9
International	1

Issues

The issue of Capital Gains Tax received 29 mentions, while other major issues included 2012 Olympics, business crime and the FSB flood finance.

Achievement

FSB launches Every Crime Every Time campaign

The FSB launched the 2008 Every Crime Every Time campaign to encourage its members to report crime. Nearly two thirds of businesses are the victims of crime but 40 per cent do not report it due to a lack of faith in the system. The campaign won the backing of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the support of 75 MPs who signed an Early Day Motion on the back of it. The FSB regions organised a variety of local lobbying events to highlight the campaign, which resulted in increased crime reporting levels in some areas of the UK.

Policy work

Transport for London gives drivers time to prepare

Using survey evidence from its members, the FSB persuaded Transport for London to give businesses in the newly formed Low Emissions Zone (LEZ) a 28 day warning before the LEZ came into effect on February 4, 2008. This gave hauliers and other drivers time to prepare by buying new vehicles, converting engines to meet the EU standard or making arrangements to avoid the LEZ altogether.

Single point of enquiry goes online

The Scottish Government launched the single point of enquiry – an FSB-backed anonymous service allowing small businesses to report poor procurement practice in the public sector.

Social and environment responsibility and the small business owner

The FSB published a Corporate Social Responsibility Report demonstrating that 92 per cent of small businesses consider themselves to be socially and environmentally responsible – resoundingly refuting the popular perception of small businesses being unconcerned about the environment.

Stormont Committee to visit Boston to learn about good practice

The FSB in Northern Ireland delivered evidence on the issue of Social Development and Town Centre Regeneration. Following the FSB submission, Stormont's Assembly Committee is now planning to visit Boston to see its Main Street Programme, cited by the FSB as a clear example of good practice.

Achievement

Tolls on Forth and Tay Bridges abolished

After a lobbying victory for the FSB in Scotland was announced in December 2007, the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Act 2008 came into force and tolls were finally removed from all bridges in Scotland. Scotland now has no tolls on any of its bridges.

Policy work

FSB calls for a National Minimum Wage increase

The FSB and the TUC called for an increase in the National Minimum Wage for apprentices from £80 to £110 per week and for grants for micro businesses hosting an apprentice. Following oral and written evidence to the Select Committee on the Draft Apprenticeships Bill, the Committee accepted the policy and is calling on the government to include it in the Draft Apprenticeships Bill. The FSB will continue to press this issue in 2009.

FSB appointment to Environment Business Support Group

The FSB was appointed to an influential business support group established by the Environment Agency. The aim of the group is to draft a policy report on raising the environmental awareness and environmental performance of businesses.

FSB campaigns against the Temporary and Agency Workers Bill

The FSB joined the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, British Chambers of Commerce and Institute Of Directors in the House of Commons, speaking against the Temporary and Agency Workers Private Members Bill at a very well attended event. The Bill was dropped, overtaken by events in Europe in the autumn.



Media coverage

National total	31
Print	27
Broadcast	4
International	1

Issues

Seven of these media hits concentrated on employment in small businesses and building up to the Keep Trade Local campaign, six focused on the relationship between supermarkets and small businesses.



Media coverage

National total	68
Print	55
Broadcast	13

Issues

Employment – including national minimum wage and EU regulations – was a big issue, featured in 11 press cuttings but the budget was the main focus, totalling 17 press cuttings.

Achievement

Postponing fuel duty increases

The FSB, lobbying as part of a business and motoring group, secured a postponement of the proposed two pence per litre increase in fuel duty on April 1, 2008.

Policy work

Appointment to a key governmental steering group in Northern Ireland

The FSB in Northern Ireland took up a position as a key stakeholder member of the Department for Employment and Learning's Dispute Resolution Steering Group. In this role, the FSB gave the small business perspective with an aim to create a definitive guide to the complicated process of resolving workplace disputes and grievances.

FSB Scotland works against red tape

The Scottish Government Regulatory Review Group, of which the FSB in Scotland is a member, published its interim report to Ministers, *Towards Better Regulation for Scotland - A New Partnership between the Scottish Government and Business*.

Batteries directive

The FSB called for an exemption for small businesses from the government's Batteries Directive. The FSB's response to the proposals argued that including very small retailers in the directive would prove environmentally unsound given the environmental costs that would be involved in transporting small volumes of waste batteries to a disposal site.

FSB manifesto for London Mayoral Elections

The FSB issued a London campaign manifesto for the Mayoral and London Assembly elections, focusing on crime, transport and procurement.

Achievement

Small Business Bonus introduced in Scotland

Following intensive lobbying by the FSB in Scotland, the Scottish Government introduced the Small Business Bonus, which will see around £135million cut from 150,000 small firms' business rates – with many paying nothing at all when the scheme comes into full effect in April 2009. The FSB is now concentrating on getting this assistance to all members who are entitled to it.

Policy work

FSB launches Local Election Manifestos

The FSB launched Local Election Manifestos focusing on the key policy areas that local authorities and councillors can influence, or have decision making powers over, such as parking, small business rates, crime and local procurement.

Invitation to Peace III Steering Group in Northern Ireland

The FSB in Northern Ireland was invited to sit on the Peace III Steering Group for Ards, North Down and Down, an initiative which aims to promote positive reconciliation, challenging attitudes to racism and sectarianism, and supports strategic models of collaboration between the public, private and community sector.

Fighting crimes against business

The FSB hosted a parliamentary reception for a group of West Midlands MPs on the national issue of crimes against business. FSB members put their concerns and experiences directly to MPs and 74 MPs signed an Early Day Motion on crime against businesses.

The FSB also responded to the Cabinet Office Crime in Communities review highlighting the importance of including the business community in consultations to tackle local crime issues.

House of Commons Regulatory Reform Committee

The FSB gave evidence to the influential Regulatory Reform Committee, where it highlighted that more needed to be done to measure and improve the perception of regulatory changes among the small business community. It also argued that new legislation should analyse the potential impact and costs to small businesses and adapt proposed regulation accordingly.



Media coverage

National total	34
Print	23
Broadcast	11

Issues

With three hits each parking, tax and the role of reservists in small businesses were all issues high on the small business agenda.



Media coverage

National total.....	69
Print.....	52
Broadcast.....	17

Issues

Employment law – including flexible working and employing agency workers – was a big topic again this month.

Policy work

Report on Health, Work and Wellbeing

The FSB was mentioned positively in Dame Carol Black's report on *Health, Work and Wellbeing* after wide consultation of its views. The report indicates a shift in government attitude towards health and work moving to a more positive focus on what people can do and recognition that work is good for wellbeing and should be supported. The report also outlines a commitment to provide free occupational health advice for employers.

A foot in the door on business rates

The FSB wrote a letter to the government calling for the Supplementary Business rate to be shelved, or at least to include certain caveats to help small businesses. As a result the FSB was invited to government department meetings to discuss our proposals and small business concerns.

Invitation to Northern Ireland's Better Regulation Board

The FSB in Northern Ireland was invited to sit on the Better Regulation Board, which is chaired by the Minister for the Environment and aims to oversee a review of current environmental regulations.

Influencing Northern Ireland's strategy for working with small firms

The FSB in Northern Ireland gave input to Invest NI, Northern Ireland's regional economic development agency, to help them put in place their strategy and programme for working with small businesses.

Achievement

Overturing red tape on young workers

The FSB forced the government to overturn plans to impose burdensome new checks and registration requirements for employees who have responsibility for under 16s in the work place. This would have affected work experience placements but also any business where an under 16 was doing a Saturday job or occasional work.

Calling for fair play on fuel

The FSB was at the forefront of the campaign against the price of fuel and demanding action on prices at the petrol pumps. Working with other organisations as part of the 'Fuel Duty Alliance' the FSB was successful in persuading government to drop the fuel duty rise planned for October 2008. A Scottish MP supported the FSB by launching a bid at Westminster to amend the Finance Bill and introduce the FSB's Fuel Duty adjuster mechanism.

Policy work

Getting a serious response to theft from small businesses

The FSB gave evidence to the House of Commons Justice Select Committee on sentencing guidance for theft from shops and the impact theft has on small businesses. The FSB responded to the original consultation in 2006, raising small businesses concerns. These were taken into account in the revised guidance which now states that aggravated theft from vulnerable victims, such as small businesses, carries the threat of a custodial sentence.

Business education and training for younger people

The FSB gave oral evidence to the Innovation, Universities and Skills Select Committee and the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee. The FSB concentrated its argument on the need for enterprise learning within schools and a focus on softer skills that small businesses require from the employees of tomorrow.

FSB calls for business organisations to be consulted

The FSB submitted evidence to the Sub National Review calling on the government to consult with business organisations when deciding local spending priorities.

June continued over...



Media coverage

National total	41
Print	24
Broadcast	17
International	1



Issues

As the credit crunch started to hit, the FSB spoke out for small businesses in the media and kept a beady eye on government business policies. The FSB also told the press about small businesses' concerns about being charged by PRS for Music for playing music in the workplace, and the organisation's tactics in chasing payments from small firms.

Promoting social enterprise

The FSB in Northern Ireland exhibited and advised at the Social Economy Conference events in the Waterfront Hall and St George's Market, Belfast. The conference aimed to raise awareness of the importance of the Social Economy Sector in Northern Ireland and to promote the fact that social enterprises are ready and willing to do business with the private and public sectors.

FSB Awards held in Stormont

The FSB in Northern Ireland held the fourth annual Future Students of Business Awards in the Long Gallery, Stormont with the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges. The Awards encourage students of business related topics at Northern Ireland's further education colleges, supporting them as the entrepreneurs of the future. The Awards also re-establish the FSB as the definitive voice of small business, with high levels of media coverage highlighting the event.

FSB puts micro businesses on the map in Europe

For the first time, the Commission has published a document acknowledging not only the importance of small businesses, but also that of micro businesses. Guenter Verheugen and his team in DG Enterprise published statistics and facts that reflect years of lobbying by the FSB to recognise the particular problems of micro businesses, which constitute 91 per cent of all businesses in the EU.

Policy work:

Local tax burden fears for small employers

The FSB highlighted the practical concerns of small employers over Scottish Government plans to introduce a local income tax. While the macro-economic debate around inward investment and competitiveness continues, the FSB is making sure that the particular administrative problems for small firms, around transferring responsibility for payment from the individual to the employer, are not ignored. High level discussions with the Scottish Government are ongoing and will continue as the details become clearer.

Using the media to campaign for fair tips

The FSB joined the Daily Mirror's Fair Tips Campaign to stop big restaurants from unfairly treating staff by manipulating unfair national minimum wage laws and topping up low wages with tips.

Making inroads into Welsh Further Education policy

The FSB in Wales made extensive inroads into the Welsh Assembly's Further Education policies by agreeing a commitment to a five-fold expansion of Workforce Development Accounts, the creation of a new £40m Employer Entitlement Fund, the creation of a £5m Further Education Institution's Services to Employers Fund to promote employer-provider relationships; and the further development of apprenticeships and improved opportunities to develop organisation specific units within qualifications.



Media coverage

National total	45
Print	35
Broadcast	10

Issues

Employment law and maternity and paternity leave was high on the agenda, concerns with late payment also started to get an airing.



Media coverage

National total	26
Print	21
Broadcast	5

Issues

Credit crunch tips, GCSE results and fuel prices were just a few of the summer issues affecting small businesses in the news.

Achievements

FSB wins pay rise for apprentices

The FSB called for a pay rise for apprentices – the government implemented this by putting in place a £10 a week rise for all apprentices.

Policy work

Flight cuts BA-d for Scottish business

British Airways' plans to cut more scheduled flights between London and Scotland were exposed by the FSB in Scotland, who led the way in highlighting the damage this will do to Scottish businesses which trade throughout the UK and beyond.

FSB recommendations taken on in health and safety report

The Better Regulation Executive launched a report committing to cut the Health and Safety burden on small businesses. The report contains four key recommendations which were made by the FSB.

Policy Work

FSB creates new Rural Affairs and Tourism Committee

The FSB created a new Rural Affairs & Tourism Committee in order to better represent the interests of rural based businesses and those involved in the tourism industry. The FSB aims to reflect the huge changes the rural economy and the tourism sector have gone through in recent times and be a unique voice that articulates the needs and concerns of those businesses to policy makers.

Successful campaigning against new biking tests

The FSB successfully campaigned for the Driving Standards Authority to delay the new motorcycle test required under the European Commission driving license directive. Our members voiced concerns that there were not enough new multi-purpose test centres to meet the demand placed upon them by motorbike driving schools. Following pressure from the FSB and motorcycle organisations, the Department for Transport agreed to put off bringing in the new test until spring 2009, when more multi-test centres will be operational.

Alcohol regulations could be 'one too many' for independent retailers

In its response to the Scottish Government discussion paper, Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol, the FSB warned that, with members still reeling from the costs of implementing the new licensing regime, dispensing a double measure of indiscriminate regulations would succeed only in making life even harder for small, community-based retailers.

Regulations get fired off

Members' concerns that the inconsistent, inappropriate enforcement of new fire regulations were threatening small tourism businesses prompted the FSB in Scotland to successfully refer the entire matter to the high-level Regulatory Review Group. This high-level panel of business experts will now investigate why the new regulatory regime is not operating as intended.

Improving pub landlords' chances

The FSB submitted written evidence to the Business and Enterprise Select Committee on its inquiry into pub companies and was subsequently invited to give oral evidence. The FSB is calling for the tie between pub companies and pubs to be scrapped, significantly improving pub landlords' chances of making a fair profit.

Reviewing standards in Europe

The European Commission started a comprehensive review evaluating the possibilities of better access to standardisation and representation following ongoing lobbying by the FSB about the creation of standards for small businesses, the lack of transparency and the lack of influence. This is a major step forward as standardisation is becoming more and more part of legislation and in some cases even replacing legislative measures.



Media coverage

National total	41
Print	28
Broadcast	11
International	1
Online	2

Issues

With the FSB upping its lobbying activities with the banks, the media coverage reflected this work.



Media coverage

National total	176
Print	94
Online	18
Broadcast	64
International	7

Achievements

Making European money available to small businesses

The FSB wrote to the Chancellor proposing methods of purchasing and distributing European Investment Bank finance. This has been taken on board by many Regional Development Agencies and one local authority, as well as the banks.

Government cracks down on late payments

Following pressure from the FSB, the government announced all departments would pay suppliers in 10 days and then launched a new Code of Practice to set out clear policy on the payment of business. Developed with the Institute of Credit Management, the code is backed by the FSB and other business organisations.

Getting help for small businesses

Following extensive lobbying by the FSB in Wales, the Assembly Government has allocated more than £290 million to fund the Flexible Support for Business (FS4B) programme, which provides a more simplified system for businesses to get the financial assistance they need in the form they need it.

Winning funding on the long-term issue of training

The FSB gave oral evidence to the Innovation, Universities and Skills Select Committee and met with Lord Young on the issue of Apprenticeships. The government designated £350 million of funding to small and medium enterprises for training through Train to Gain – with assurances that more funding will be provided for informal, bite-sized, on the job training, which the FSB has been lobbying on for many years.

Saving energy for small businesses

Following FSB lobbying, energy companies will now be placed under much greater scrutiny from OFGEM, the UK's gas and electricity regulator, to ensure they handle complaints more effectively. Small businesses will also have access to a new independent redress scheme (taking the form of an ombudsman) with the power to resolve consumer complaints and, where necessary, make sure the problem is put right or compensation awarded.

October continued over...

Policy work

The FSB's Small Business Survival Package

The FSB launched a blueprint for saving small businesses during the downturn: the Small Business Survival Package, which called on the government to introduce policy in procurement, late payments and access to finance. Important aspects of the package have been adopted by the government and the Conservative party.

Raising concerns about the National Identity Card scheme

The FSB responded to the Identity Card Delivery Scheme 2008 consultation, raising awareness of the likely impact on business and potential added costs of employers having to carry out multi-layered checks on their employees via the National Identity Register and having to pay for this service.

Calling for the police to link up with businesses

The FSB responded to the Home Office Green Paper on policing, raising the need for Neighbourhood Policing Units to engage directly with the business community and voicing concerns about individuals directly elected to police authorities when the emphasis should be on engaging with local communities and encouraging businesses to get involved.

FSB provides financial updates

FSB members gave their views on the worsening economic situation in a series of financial polls which were used widely by the media, and to inform the banks, government and opposition parties.

Businesses are not lifestyle monitors, the HSE confirms

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) confirmed its commitment to not expect employers to become lifestyle monitors for their staff, the HSE expressed its agreement with the FSB that employers should not be advising staff on diet, exercise, alcohol or lifestyle issues which occur outside of the work place.

Influencing Northern Ireland's Business Crime Strategy

The FSB in Northern Ireland has been instrumental in assisting with the development of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Business Crime Strategy, announced in October.



Issues

An extraordinary month for the economy, the FSB was actively sharing the small business perspective on the banking crisis and bailout, the credit crunch and its effect on small businesses; and helping small businesses get the support they need.



Media coverage

National total	182
Print	88
Online	41
Broadcast	53
International	3

Achievements

The FSB achieves £1 billion victory

The FSB got the £1 billion fund for small business loans it had called for in a high-profile nationwide campaign, when the Chancellor gave his Pre-Budget Report. The report also introduced empty property rate relief for one year, something else the FSB had called for, and included up to £7 billion of financial support for small firms.

Freezing Corporation Tax

The FSB campaigned for the 21p tax to be frozen, and for the government not to pursue a 1p rise to 22p. The Chancellor announced the freeze in his Pre-Budget Report.

Post Office Ltd gets Post Office Card Account

The FSB celebrated when James Purnell MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, announced that the Post Office Card Account was awarded exclusively to Post Office Limited, following an end to the tendering process. This is a major step in the right direction to make the Post Office network viable and prevent future closures.

The government agrees to make public procurement easier

The FSB played an important role in informing the government's Glover Committee on how to make it easier for small businesses to land lucrative public procurement contracts. The Glover Report took on many of the FSB's suggestions and the government has confirmed that all 12 recommendations on improving access for small firms will be put in place. The launch in July of Public Contracts Scotland, a free Scottish procurement portal, was one of the key requests in the FSB's 2007 Scottish Election Manifesto.

Visit Scotland victory

The FSB in Scotland won a victory on the tourism front, with the announcement that the Scottish tourism website, VisitScotland.com, is to be brought back into public ownership. This addresses many of the FSB's long-standing concerns and comes after consistent FSB lobbying on the operation of the website in particular and about how small operators in this vital industry are supported generally. Scottish ministers have also announced that a task group is to look into skills and training issues, such as the establishment of a 'hotel school'.

November continued over...

FSB wins agreement to review attitude to theft from shops

The FSB won agreement from Minister of Justice, Jack Straw to revise the guidance for police about handing out Fixed Penalty Notices for theft from shops. The FSB argued that these notices should not be used for repeat offenders and should be applied more consistently. The FSB worked with Anne McIntosh, MP to table questions in the House of Commons to outline the need for this guidance to be reviewed and evaluated in the future.

The government backs the FSB's Fit Note initiative

After five years of intense lobbying, the government finally backed a pioneering FSB initiative to help employers and employees make decisions about health and work. Getting backing for the Fit Note, which will allow employers and employees to decide when they are well enough to come back to work after an absence on sick leave, is a real milestone for the FSB.

Holding off unfair pensions policies

Following FSB pressure to change the Pension Bill, rather than wait for the 2016 review, it was amended to remove 2.72million small firm owners who are the sole employee of their business and would have been swept into having to take on the burden of automatic enrolment.

FSB wins a regulation policy victory

After many years of lobbying, the FSB welcomed the Better Regulation Executive's announcement that from the beginning of the next parliamentary session there will be requirements for departments to consider if and why specific legislation should apply to small businesses, an important step in the regulation of small businesses and a positive response.

Overturing a burdensome dispute legal framework

FSB lobbying led to the burdensome legal framework, which regulates how businesses deal with disputes, being finally overturned in parliament.

Policy work

Encouraging sign-ups as school governors

The FSB signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding with the School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS) to encourage more small business owners to become school governors, to strengthen the links between businesses and education, to the benefit of both. <http://www.sgoos.org.uk/home/>



Issues

With banks failing to lend to small businesses, they continued to dominate the FSB news agenda. The FSB also commented actively when interest rates hit an historic low and with the Pre-Budget report aimed at helping home-owners, families and small businesses, the FSB ensured its views were in the media.



Media coverage

National total	142
Print	74
Online	21
Broadcast	47

Achievements

Banks agree to accounts being switched more quickly

The FSB called on the banks to make switching between banks easier and faster at one of the meetings of the Small Business Banking Forum, of which the FSB is a member. As a direct result of FSB lobbying, the banks agreed to allow clients to switch accounts from one bank to another within five days.

Congestion charge NO! vote in Manchester

The FSB and its North West Area Policy Unit was a leading voice in the victorious 'No!' campaign against the referendum on the proposed, and hotly contested congestion charge in Manchester.

A new 'Talent Map' portal is put in place

The FSB was one of the five creators of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills 'Talent Map', an online portal for employers to use if they want to invest in skills within their workplace. The FSB provided the small business input and the 'Talent Map' received ministerial agreement.

Shielding small businesses from a language burden

Because of pressure from the FSB in Wales legislation on the Welsh language has been delayed, making sure small businesses are not subject to the same laws on using Welsh as big public sector bodies. The proposed legislation would put Welsh and English on an equal footing and create a commissioner to oversee the law.

Policy work

FSB is a central player in fighting the credit crunch

The FSB met with prominent MPs across the country, gave evidence to the Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform select committee and attended the Small Business Finance Forum with Lord Mandelson and the heads of all major banks in the UK.

Rate relief in Northern Ireland

Following months of high-profile pressure by the FSB in Northern Ireland, the issue of a Rates Relief Scheme, in line with those already operating throughout the rest of the UK, was brought to the fore. Finally, in December, a Targeted Rates Relief Scheme was announced, a first step in the right direction.

December continued over...

FSB launches its influential biennial membership survey

The FSB launched *Putting the economy back on track*, a series of five reports looking at all aspects of life and work for small businesses. A full survey of the FSB's membership, it gives a comprehensive picture of everything from crime against business, to IT use, to finances.

OFGEM Energy Supply Probe – Initial Findings report

The FSB welcomed the findings of the OFGEM report which finally recognised the similarity between small businesses and domestic users of energy. The report accepts that the energy market could be significantly improved for small businesses.

Establishing a small business voice on standards in Europe

The FSB joined a working group NORMAPME (European member organisation on standards; its membership represents over 11 million enterprises across Europe). NORMAPME launched a forum in November to establish a small business voice on standards in Europe. This forum is expected to unify small and medium sized enterprises on standards issues.

Health and safety is important to small firms

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched its strategy showing the HSE's commitment to small businesses and improving the burden of health and safety, following input and continued lobbying from the FSB.

FSB calls for National Minimum Wage freeze

The FSB called on the Low Pay Commission to trust employers to give pay rises they could afford in the light of economic uncertainty. Giving evidence to the commission, the FSB said this was no time to be raising the National Minimum Wage.



Issues

The banks, shutting up shop over the Christmas break and the economy dominated the FSB's news agenda over the festive season.

Keep Trade Local...



Picture - Maxine Beuret

Key achievements

- 50,000 people signed up to the FSB petition calling on the Prime Minister to ensure the future of small businesses
- The Keep Trade Local campaign ran a travelling photo exhibition, with pictures of vibrant shops across the country which visited seven towns in England and six areas of London
- The campaign received an enormous amount of media coverage, including more than 150 articles in regional press during the first six months.
- More than 50 MPs signed an Early Day Motion calling on Members of Parliament to buy their Christmas dinner locally

Uniting shopkeepers, businesses and communities through the year

The FSB launched its national Keep Trade Local campaign in 2008, a campaign to save our shops and preserve our high streets and communities in the face of 2,000 local shops being forced to close each year.

The campaign started with a mass lobby of parliament in March 2008 and was followed up by a letter-writing campaign to Members of Parliament to explain the FSB's policies.

After that, the FSB regions sent out the Keep Trade Local Manifesto to local authorities and governing bodies. The campaign consists of six policy issues: planning, parking charges, business rates, crime prevention, post office closures and public procurement.

The Keep Trade Local campaign made an impact on high streets around the country with window stickers, car stickers, balloons, bags and other material at local meetings, fairs and market stalls, where thousands of signatures were also collected on the petition. In the autumn, a travelling photo exhibition, with photos by Maxine Beuret, sponsored by the Arts Council, made its way round the country.

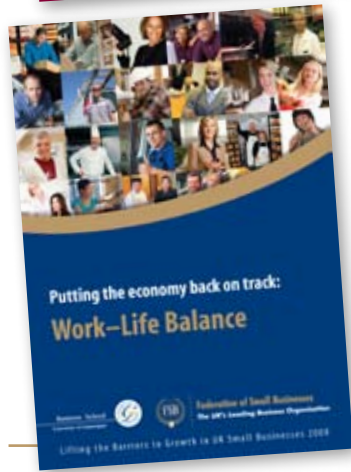
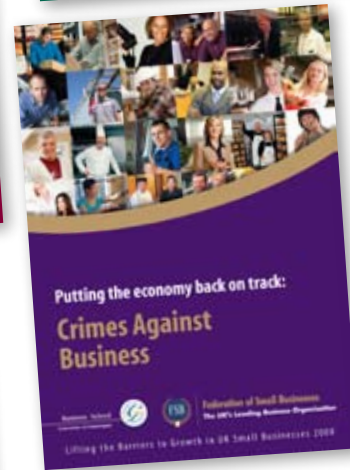
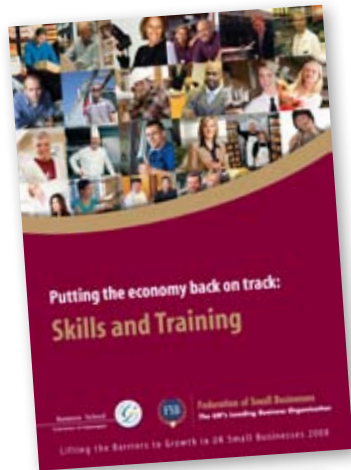
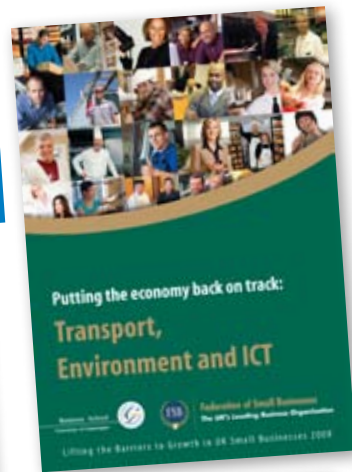
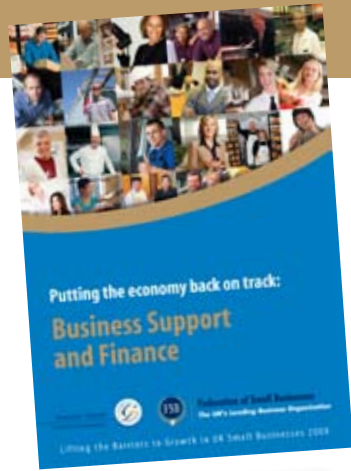
Other highlights include

- The Thames Valley region local authority wrote to small businesses urging them to apply for Business Rate relief following FSB lobbying. Thames Valley also took up the FSB's suggestion to pay its invoices to small businesses within 20 days
- The Essex region asked council leaders how many public sector contracts had been awarded to local businesses. The results were ranked and publicised in the local press. Ongoing work with the local authorities in Essex has made the process of applying for contracts simpler and the local authorities involved have made available better information about public procurement contracts
- Campaigning in Harlestone helped reverse the local authority's decision to bring in high parking charges in the city centre
- In Reading, many of the local papers adopted the campaign and successfully lobbied the local council to consider the interests of a small independent business over that of a supermarket

The onset of the credit crunch brought further focus to the campaign. Local authorities and Members of Parliament were reminded of the importance of Keeping Trade Local and supporting local shops.

One of the greatest achievements of Keep Trade Local is that it has remained a grass roots campaign, led and owned by the FSB regions.

Surveying FSB members



The FSB published its biennial membership survey, **Putting the Economy Back on Track**, in December 2008 and released the findings in the form of five reports.

The main findings of the reports were

1. Business Support and Finance

- 50 per cent of respondents said that banks are their major source of finance
- Concerns over access to finance and pressure on cash flow are issues for businesses looking to grow as well as struggling businesses
- Pressure on cash flow is one of the main barriers to businesses meeting their objectives

2. Transport, Environment and ICT

- More than two thirds of businesses have a website but only a small proportion make full use of ICT to link their website to suppliers and sell online
- One of the key reasons for lack of take-up of more sophisticated internet tools could be the lack of access to high speed broadband, only 37 per cent of businesses said they had access to broadband of more than 4Mbps

3. Skills and Training

- Basic skills deficiencies in numeracy and literacy continue to be an issue for many small firms
- Growth-focused firms tend to use more firm-specific and firm-based training, such as 'learning-by-doing' or 'on-the-job'
- The Train to Gain programme does not currently meet the needs of small firms

4. Crimes against business

- 64 per cent of businesses have been a victim of crime over the past twelve months, a rise of seven per cent since the previous survey in 2006 (57 per cent)
- The average cost of crime per business is £13,354
- 67 per cent of businesses surveyed were not aware that Neighbourhood Policing Units exist

5. Work-life balance

- 13 per cent of businesses would lose everything and a further 36 per cent of business owners would risk their home and basic survival if their business went under
- In terms of quality of life, respondents are positive about the flexibility to choose their own hours and the feeling of independence. However, the length of hours worked, inconvenience and division of work and family time are all serious issues, almost 68 per cent work more than 46 hours a week

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