



Says...

KEEP TRADE LOCAL

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES
Northern Ireland

Much Achieved, Much To Do

Devolution in Northern Ireland





FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESS



Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses is Northern Ireland's largest business organisation with 8000 members and growing, from across every sector of industry. As well as providing a series of benefits for members, the FSB lobbies decision makers to create a better business environment.

The FSB has worked closely with all the local political parties since the inception of its policy unit in 1998. With the restoration of devolution in May 2007, my colleagues and I have worked to promote small business issues and concerns, and I am happy to report that our views and ideas have been taken on board as a pro-enterprise ethos has been placed at the heart of the Assembly's programme for government.

Northern Ireland is, and will remain, a small business economy. Efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investment are welcome, but the global economic downturn has reminded us all that it is vital that we support our indigenous businesses and give them the tools to grow and prosper.

Now is time to review how devolution has helped local businesses, and to highlight the issues that need to be addressed as we move forward. The FSB looks forward to continuing engagement and partnership with our elected colleagues.

Wilfred Mitchell O.B.E

FSB Policy Chairman, Northern Ireland





Lobbying for small businesses

The FSB supports the system of government which will most effectively listen to views of the small business sector, the economic generator for Northern Ireland, and take them on board when formulating public policy.

The FSB has worked with all the parties represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly to promote the interests of small businesses. As well as regular contact with the political parties and MLAs, the FSB has presented evidence on the following issues:

<i>Programme for Government</i>	Outlining the economic priorities facing the restoration of devolution
<i>First Minister and Deputy First Minister</i>	Improving relations with the European Union
<i>Finance and Personnel</i>	Small Business Rates Relief Scheme; review of the Northern Ireland public procurement strategy
<i>Enterprise, Trade and Investment</i>	Attacking red tape; regulating trade directories; tourist board strategy; debt relief orders; broadband; review of the Northern Ireland economic policy
<i>Employment and Learning</i>	Apprenticeships; workplace dispute resolution; proposals to extend holiday entitlements
<i>Environment</i>	Vehicle operator's licence; climate change
<i>Regional Development</i>	Infrastructure and transport needs; ports policy; review of water and sewerage charges
<i>Social Development</i>	Town and city centre regeneration; post office closure programme; reforming the medical statement
<i>Cross Sector Advisory Forum</i>	Addressing the economic downturn
<i>Health</i>	Tobacco advertising

The FSB has welcomed the following measures for helping small businesses...

- The introduction of automatic small business rates relief scheme – still not available in England
- Review of the planning system, which should speed up process times and reduce the amount of bureaucracy that small businesses face when they make an application
- The development of the Regional Innovation Strategy, encouraging local businesses to embrace innovative techniques through funding and logistical assistance
- The US:NI investment conference, providing a platform for encouraging future investment
- A freeze on manufacturing rates
- Short term aide programmes to assist small businesses through the economic downturn
- An overhaul of the workplace dispute mechanisms
- Overhaul of the apprenticeship programme, improving accessibility for small businesses
- Approval of public fiscal measures to support local businesses through the economic downturn
- The creation of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum, engaging the business and voluntary communities and enabling local representatives to formulate a plan across a number of policy areas to help the local economy
- Strategy to encourage town centre regeneration
- The ongoing review of environmental legislation.

We welcome the Review of Public Administration and the proposed delegation of local responsibilities to local people.



Case Study – Childlink – database company

John Quinliven, Owner

“Ten years ago if you had told me I’d be running a business in the middle of an interface area I wouldn’t have believed it - today I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else.

But with the growing confidence created by devolution and the general air of hope and optimism it has brought, people were willing to embrace these changes and invest in the new technology we were using.

We quickly realised the impact this would have not only on our business but on Northern Ireland as a whole as it showed outside investors and clients were now willing to spend money here and realise the enormous wealth of skills, talent and products we have to offer.

It also helped open up trade links on a much wider, global scale and brought local people together who previously allowed religion to segregate and divide them.”

Case Study – Core Systems – biometric technology company

Patricia O’Hagan, Managing Director

“When we started our work was shrouded in mystery; now we attract clients from across the world with our expertise.

Prior to the devolution business growth was very difficult for us but now we feel much more confident and can comfortably show off our wares at trade shows around the world and promote the various products and services we have to offer.

We have enjoyed rapid expansion and have recently opened an office in California, as we continue to deliver our work to a much greater client base than we ever could have imagined before.

For years we have heard about the phenomenon of the so called ‘brain drain’ affecting the Northern Ireland economy but we feel that trend is slowing down thanks to the improved social, economic and political situation here.”

The future

The FSB believes that Northern Ireland businesses and the economy are best served by an efficient, joined up government system, which consults meaningfully with those who run their own businesses.

To date, devolution has delivered in a number of areas. However there is much still to be achieved.

The FSB would like to see the following policies being implemented:

- Publish Planning Policy Statement 5 to support our independent retail sector
- Improve opportunities for small businesses through public procurement
- Introduce an easily accessible programme to replace the disbanded MLN online learning resource
- Improve services provided by Invest NI to support post-start up businesses to establish and grow
- Embrace a greater 'risk-taking' approach by all those responsible for economic development, addressing concerns of continuing slow decision-making and bureaucracy-centred approach
- Effective engagement with Northern Ireland representatives in the European Union, ensuring that funding and programmes are maximised for enterprise
- Create sector specific training 'centres of excellence'
- Speedily implement the MATRIX report recommendations
- Maximise cross-border economic structures and initiatives where appropriate
- Develop an effective future skills strategy.

Small businesses will judge the performance of public representatives on their DELIVERY of measures to help them manage and grow their businesses. Therefore the FSB urges all those elected to press for practical measures to be implemented - as opposed to endless reviews and the 'sub-group of sub-group' culture.



How can you help Keep Trade Local?

This campaign can only succeed if people like YOU get involved.

The Keep Trade Local campaign was inspired by FSB members, adopted by members at annual conference in March 2008, and is now being delivered by members in local communities across the country.

The campaign seeks to unite communities, businesses and residents associations across the country that find themselves under threat from the range of problems currently driving small independent retailers out of our high streets.



Says...

KEEP TRADE
LOCAL

Things you can do to make a difference:

- Write to your local representative ensuring that they understand the problems small businesses are facing
- Write to your local newspaper
- Join your FSB's Keep Trade Local network
- Ensure that FSB posters and campaign materials are in the windows of small shops on your local high street
- Run a local campaign in your branch/region

And last but not least,

- Shop local and use your local businesses – if we don't use our local shops and tradespeople we will lose them

Keep Trade Local has already been endorsed by leading political figures from across the political spectrum. It has achieved celebrity endorsement and has struck a chord with people up and down the UK.

We now need your support to carry the campaign forward. Our local communities deserve nothing less.

We will follow up this document with more information on each campaigning area.

For more information about the campaign please contact Aviva Bresky: aviva.bresky@fsb.org.uk

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Copies of this publication may be obtained by writing to:

Federation of Small Businesses

Cathedral Chambers, 143 Royal Avenue, Belfast BT1 1FH

Telephone: 028 9032 6035

Facsimile: 028 9032 6113

email: info.nireland@fsb.org.uk

website: www.fsb.org.uk/ni

Public Affairs:

Jonathan Walmsley

email: jonathan.walmsley@fsb.org.uk

.....

Policy:

Carolyn Brown

email: carolyn.brown@fsb.org.uk

George Dorrian

email: george.dorrian@fsb.org.uk

.....

Regional Organiser:

Paulene Kerr

email: paulene.kerr@fsb.org.uk

Designed on behalf of the Federation of Small Businesses by Cactus Design, 5-7 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD.

Telephone: 029 2078 0220

email: studio@cactusdesignltd.co.uk

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