



Good to meet so many of you at National Conference and get your feedback on the work of the Policy Unit. I will be making recommendations for changes as a result.

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Stop Press – Barriers Questionnaire is now out

In the SW the FSB’s Barriers survey is fundamental to everything we do so a good response is vital. By now you should have the paper version.

If you prefer to do it on line, you need to have your membership number and 30 or 40 minutes and if the first question does not apply, just go to the next – the link is:-

http://www.fsb.org.uk/surveys/fsb_ltb_2008.htm

Please, please, please complete and return the questionnaire or do it on line – we need a good response. Thank you – your help is really very much appreciated in this.

Elections! – make the FSB’s voice heard

The run up to elections is a wonderful time for FSB members to really make their voices heard about matters affecting small businesses – and no I am not talking about the frantic 3 or 4 weeks before the voting.

Many branches and regions will already have good relations with councillors of all parties and working with all parties is vital. Now is the time to start talking to them about the things small businesses would like to see in their manifesto. County and Unitary authorities can directly affect on-street parking, roads in general, buses, schools and many have economic development departments. How far do their public procurement policies support the work of their economic development units? Scarce development monies could be made to go much further if council spending is used to lever in other results.

A few places will have elections in May. This item is not about them. Most places in the SW will have County elections next May, with EU elections in June. And there is the general election which must be held on or before June 3rd 2010.

So start brushing up your contacts, agree your local priorities and get cracking. If you need more help, there are ‘How to...’ Documents on the website which should help – or contact me at

Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

And just to show what can be done - Expert Campaigning tips from an FSB member

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A brilliant article in one of the Gloucestershire papers began:-

Business leaders are celebrating after a parking scheme to boost weekend trade has been extended. Gloucester City Council agreed last year to cut parking fees at Station Road and Great Western Road in a bid to boost trade following the summer floods.

So I asked the FSB's Gloucester Branch Chairman Mark Owen how he did it – he replied:-

“Branch officers and members need to champion a cause that the businesses in their area feel passionate about - like parking/waste/police and then work with and make friends with the councillors from **all** parties - never knock them in the press and always say that they the FSB have a good relationship with them. Then find the journalist in the area - I normally write a release, but it can be done over the phone to the paper - but it must be their local paper/really local i.e. Stroud News and Journal for Stroud - the more local the paper the better....don't rely on the paper to send a photographer but take a shot themselves, give the paper as much as possible - they do not have the time but are desperate for stories delivered on a plate, never give anything that is not news worthy, never waste their time, obviously there is more to it..

“I hope this helps.....he finished

Many thanks Mark – I am sure it will.

If you have some tips or good ideas to pass on, please drop an e-mail to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Strategic Partnerships and Area Agreements explained – April 27th

For those looking to get more involved with their local council, the Study Day on April 27th is a must. We will be finding out about LSPs¹, LAAs² and MAAs³ and how members use them to help small businesses. We will also be spending some time looking at the implications for our own organisation.

Government Office for the SW is opening up especially for us on a Sunday, so important do they consider this activity.

Written invitations have been sent to all Branch Secretaries, but if you are interested and would like the documentation, drop an e-mail to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk . The SW Policy Unit will be paying travel costs. Please register your attendance by March 30th .

¹ – LSPs - Local Strategic Partnerships

² – LAAs - Local Area Agreements

³ – MAAs - Multi Area Agreements

Need help for your business from a University?

The Higher Skills Project enables businesses to access higher level training to increase the skills of their workforce and improve their business offering. A team of eleven intermediaries is working within the sectors of the creative industries, engineering and business improvement to assess the needs of local companies and to work with them in setting up tailored and flexible training programmes.

The training programmes are designed and delivered in conjunction with one of the region's universities or specialist institutions, giving businesses access to a huge range of expertise across the three sectors. Depending on the business requirement, training solutions can be implemented in a wide variety of skills areas and can be delivered in the form of e-learning, work-based learning or at the universities themselves.

One of the region's SME's currently benefiting from skills training is Alvis Brothers, a family-run farm situated at the foot of the Mendip Hills, which employs 120 people. On-site training has taken place to provide business specific, work-based training opportunities for staff. In addition, the company's management team has attended an intensive 3 week training programme at the Royal Agricultural College in business management and leadership, allowing them to develop skills important for the future growth of the business.

The Higher Skills Project marks a change in the way that universities provide expertise and training to business. By addressing the bottom-line, offering flexible delivery, harnessing new technology and linking learning with organisational strategy, Higher Education can prove its worth to the business community.

For further information or to see how your business could benefit from this project please visit <http://www.expertsouthwest.com/text/109/higherskills.html>

Alternatively contact Shamala Govindasamy, Higher Skills Project Manager, at Shamala.Govindasamy@herda-sw.ac.uk or call 01392 454109 and please let Vivienne Rayner know how you get on.

Environment Agency Seeks Help from Business...

They are trying to make sense of what issues like flooding; waste; resources; energy and transport mean in reality. And to do this, they are actually doing some listening. As Neil Murdock, Principle Officer, Regional Environmental Planning at the EA (and the driving force behind the project) said, *'It is only by reflecting on the needs of those at the sharp end and framing policy development in ways which helps them make sense of what we are trying to do, that we can begin to make a real difference to the quality of the environment for all'*.

Wow!

You have probably guessed the next bit! They would like our help to get under the skin of what all this means from your business perspective. They are looking for two or three businesses to spend about an hour, talking about issues like flooding; waste; resources; energy and transport. They will see you at your convenience and, unless you say otherwise and want some publicity, it will be entirely confidential.

If you can help the Environment Agency plug some important gaps in their understanding, please let Viv know at Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk or contact Mark Yoxon direct at inform@inform-global.com

Transport – smarter not harder– your brainwaves wanted

At a recent meeting, the FSB's transport committee decided to promote the idea of smarter alternatives to conventional 9-5 transport usage. Issues such as work/life balance, cutting journey times, flexible working, and living near your place of work, were all discussed.

They are now after practical case studies for use in the first of a series of 4-5 page documents.

For example: staggering of school times, strategic park and ride schemes, purchasing of environmentally friendly fleets, varying shift times, subsidised travel with local operators.

Anything you have done to reduce the need to use transport, make it easier to use public transport or to avoid the rush hours.

Matt Jaffa, Transport Policy Advisor in the London Office would like to hear from you with any examples matthew.jaffa@fsb.org.uk

2012 Games and your business

The January newsletter carried an item on 'selling' to the 2012 Olympics and the new portal called 'CompeteFor'.

Business Link have come back to me saying that many members are 'registering' their details, but not 'publishing' them. Only when you press the button to 'publish' does your information 'go live'.

This allows you to

- Match your business profile with contracts that specifically interest you and contact you
- Check whether you are 'business ready' against 3 important criteria
- Refer suppliers not yet 'fit to supply' to business support for appropriate solutions

- Proactively share your profile with buyers looking for suppliers
- Enable you to identify who has won first tier contracts

You should also be able to browse the site for opportunities, respond to an opportunity, search for suppliers & partners, set alert preferences and also view results and contract awards.

So remember, to get the best out of the site, 'publish' your information.

VAT Reminder – unique invoice numbers

On the VAT side of things, we have been asked to mention that from 1/10/07 it has been a requirement for sales invoices to show a "unique and sequential" invoice number eg 1/08, 2/08 etc so that no invoice will ever have the same number as another. HMRC have very sweetly offered not to penalise anybody for failure to do this for the first year.

Regarding registration, some "trade businesses" eg plumbers who are in great demand have found registration has not damaged their businesses at all and they have liked claiming back tax on such things as vans and equipment. One man's meat....

Also, you have to the end on the month following that in which you exceeded the threshold before you have to register and then you don't have to if your next 12 months Turnover won't exceed £65k – but you do have to explain matters to HMRC. However as registrations are taking up to a year – yes we have been told of a member whose registration took a year, we recommend you plan ahead on this.

Construction Industry Gross Payments

The gross payment issue (known as TTQT) is currently a hot potato at CIRIP (Construction Industry Reform Implementation Panel) between Industry and HMRC. Any instances of refusals are welcome. HMRC did publish on their website what failures would be used to refuse the status some months ago. Sue Cave from Cornwall, has objected that HMRC were planning to use small unpaid balances on Statements of Account as an instance of failure and they seemed to do a U-Turn on this. She is interested if there are instances where they have sneaked this in.

So if you have any experience of this, good or bad, please let Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk know and she will pass it on to Sue.

Train to Gain

Good experiences or bad? We would really like to know.

Members are reporting 'problems' with Train to gain at meetings, but cannot quote specifics – and as always it is specifics we need to take action.

So please let Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk have details of your experiences, good and bad.

The Employer Guide to Training Providers - free advertising!

When Train to Gain was being established, FSB reps on the various bodies worked hard to make sure the private sector was included in and that all the work did not automatically go to the colleges. This is a reminder that if you are not on the 'Employer's guide' then the brokers cannot recommend you.

With 1,630 training providers in the South West region now registered on the EGTTTP, it is being increasingly valued as the place to look – and about 18,000 look there very month in the South West alone..

The FSB was also successful in getting included an additional facility for employers to 'rate' training provision they have received. Employers want to know about the quality of training offered and also what is most appropriate for their business. This Guide offers them more information based on employer recommendation.

Providers with the highest ratings then appear at the top of the search results and may attract additional business due to others seeing evidence of the quality of training on offer.

Is your organisation registered on the Employer Guide to Training?

Check here: www.employersguide.org.uk

Go to search facility and click on advanced search.

Type in your organisation's name and click on search

If you are not registered and would like to be, click on 'Information for Training Providers' and find out how to get on. If you have any problems or queries, contact Chloe Moorhead on 01452 450035.

Vivienne Rayner – 25th March 2008