

Stop Press - New SW Loan fund - £10 million available

Rates Success ! – how to pay less than half the increase in your rates

Case studies – and help us carry on campaigning with your case studies

Business link – Credit crunch help and health checks – Just what we need or failing to meet expectations. What is your experience?

Credit Crunch Survey results – what you are telling us – with pictures

Rural issues – information offered – feedback welcomed

Tax issues – late payment penalties – have you been affected?

Employment law – some good news and some bad news

Windows and New Building Regulations – help us make the case against

Stop Press - New SW Loan fund - £10 million available

As part of the drive for economic recovery, the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) has announced the launch of a new £10m South West Loans Fund which is now available to help growth-oriented business with viable business plans.

Interested businesses should contact Business Link on 0845 600 9966 or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/southwest.

Rates Success ! - how to pay less than half the increase in your rates

It's official! Government will allow businesses to spread the 5% rates hike over the next 3 years. Arrangements are also in hand to help those hit by the loss of transition relief.

Full details are promised for July and meanwhile you are supposed to be paying the bills already sent out. But I understand some local councils are helping.

When they have sorted out how they are going to do it, your local council will write to you offering you the option to defer 60% of the increase in your rates. So it will include the loss of transition relief as well as the 5% hike.

If you take up the option, you will pay half the amount deferred in 2010/11 and the other half in 2011/12. To put it another way, if you take up the option, you will pay 40% of the extra rates this year, 30% next and 30% of the increase the year after. The 'extra' will cover loss of transition relief as well as the 5% hike.

A word of caution – there will still be changes to your rates bill from the RPI in September this year and in 2010, although this year they are expected to be minimal or even negative. And there is the effect of the revaluation to include from April next year.

But please, keep on paying the rates as per your current demand until you hear. And if you are really stuck, talk to your local council – we have already had reports that some of them are helping out.

Case studies – and help us carry on campaigning with your case studies

The FSB is looking for businesses that are having trouble paying their business rates and would benefit from automatic rate relief. We are also gathering case studies on entrepreneurs who started their business under the Enterprise Allowance Scheme in the 80s and 90s. Contact Marc Shoffman at the London Office on marc.shoffman@fsb.org.uk with your experiences.

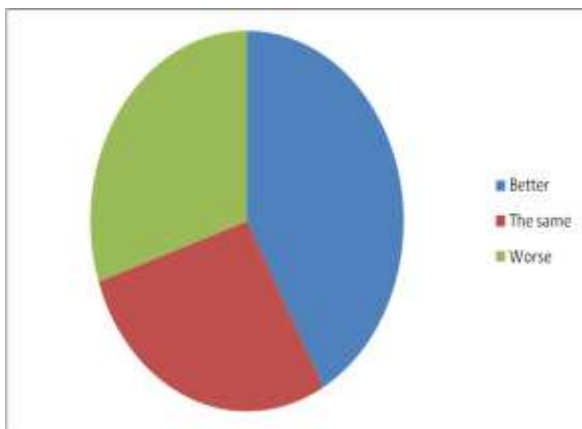
Rural issues – information offered – feedback welcomed

The FSB's SW Policy Unit is a member of SW CoRE – SW Chamber of Rural Enterprise. We get a number of newsletters from them about offers, issues, grants and courses relating to rural businesses. If you would like to see these, please get in touch. If you would like to help the SW Policy unit by commenting on rural matters, please contact Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Credit Crunch Survey results - what you are telling us – with pictures

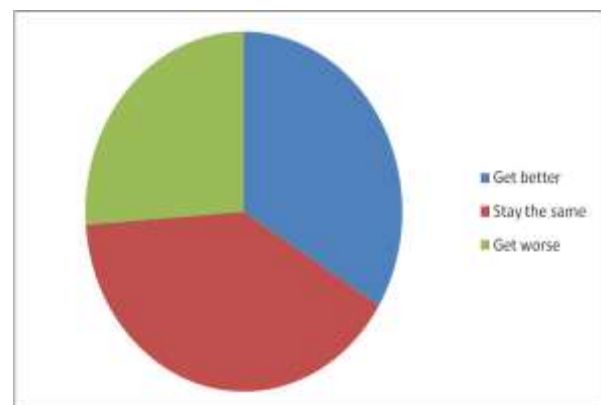
Thought you might be interested in the results of the latest survey. FSB Devon did the honours this time and I very much appreciate their responses.

Basically, things do seem to be improving.



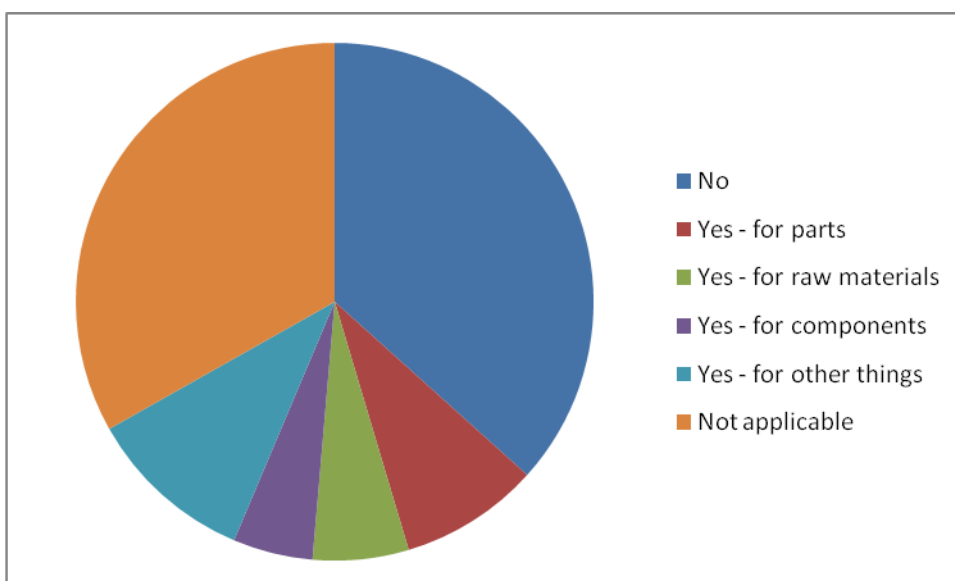
March turnover vs February.

Some members stated that the improvement in March turnover was mirrored by a big fall in profit margin .



Prospects for the next 3 months

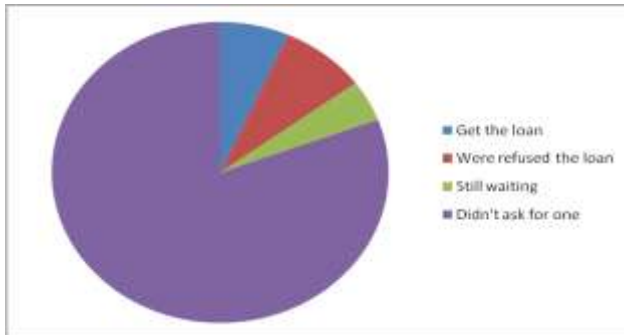
Members were much more hopeful than the Press would have us believe.



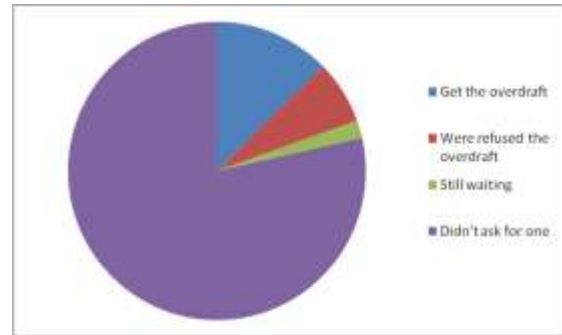
The survey supported member

comment about the emergence of shortages in supply with 9%, 7% and 11% reporting problems with parts, raw

materials and other items respectively. Businesses affected were mainly retail with some manufacturing and a number from the motor trade. The biggest reason was that cuts in stock holdings have gone too far.



On the 'bank' front, 19% of members had sought a loan in the last month. 7% were successful, 8% were refused and 4% were still waiting.



The figures for overdraft were slightly better. 13% had sought an overdraft facility with 8% successful, 3% being refused and 2% still waiting.

The question about 'shortages' was included as a result of member comment. If you think we are missing something, please let me know at Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk and I'll see if we can include it in a future survey.

Business link – Credit crunch help and health checks – Just what we need or failing to meet expectations. What is your experience?

We are starting to get the occasional comment from members that Business Link is making a lot of noise about helping during the credit crunch, but when asked for help or advice, they are not delivering. Others have found them really helpful.

What is this your experience?

What is helping and what isn't?

Comments as usual please to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk – and the compliments are even more helpful than the criticisms.

Tax issues – late payment penalties – have you been affected?

Following HMRC's 'Spread the tax' brainstorm they seem to be going back to their old curmudgeonly ways. Apart from problems with the local offices detailed last month, we are now getting reports of unfair penalties being imposed.

In one case, a member was unable to get through on the business support line, so sent in his return with a note. They paid no attention to the note and hit him with a penalty against which he is appealing. Anyone else had similar experiences?

Comments to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk please

Employment law – some good news and some bad news

The bad news first – holiday leave is now 20 days plus the 8 Bank holidays and all parents of children under 16 can now ask for flexible working.

The good news is 4 years of hard lobbying have paid off and we have a new system of dispute resolution.

Information about all these is on the ACAS website – but as FSB members you have access to the FSB's 24 hour legal helpline as part of your membership. Phone number is 08450 727 727 and you will need your membership number to access.

Having looked at the information on line, if your staff work unusual hours or shifts or have various forms of flexible arrangements, the ACA document on 'Holidays and Holiday Pay' is really helpful – find it at <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=806>

We are still working to get all regulation put on hold during the recession so you can focus on your businesses – so keep those red tape issues coming to Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Windows and New Building Regulations– help us make the case against

New Building regulations are coming in next April and members have been in touch about the bureaucratic burden and cost of those relating to windows.

The SW Policy Unit is working with a group of members to come up with a practicable alternative. If the new regulations are going to affect you and you want to help, get in touch with Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Vivienne Rayner

16th April 2009