

Shape Our Thinking

Thank you to all of you who filled the online survey during August, it is helping to shape our thinking in preparing policies for the FSB Manifesto for the 2011 National Assembly Election. Here are key issues where you've been informing our discussions with Government:

Business Support

We have asked our members what they truly feel about the Flexible Support for Business (FS4B) service now that it has had more time to embed, in a survey during August 2010, members answered that; 45% were aware of the service and 6 in ten who had used the service rate it as good. Businesses need one clear place to go to access business support and research needs to be undertaken into what services would be most valued by small businesses. Not all business support is financial or necessarily what is traditionally thought of as business support. Advice on planning, crime prevention and environmentally beneficial improvements and opportunities would be important for small businesses.

Wales Stock Exchange

34% of members would support a stock exchange for Wales, and 22% don't know. 21% of members would consider floating their business either in the short term or long term, including 12% who would consider if they had access to the right support and advice. The Welsh Assembly Government should undertake a feasibility study into setting up a stock exchange based on the Welsh economy, to provide another means of equity as well as to promote and develop a strong competitive economy in Wales.

Training

Training business owners would mainly benefit from would be Marketing or PR, financial and IT. Health and safety training was also something many felt they would benefit from. The training members feel that their staff would benefit from would be customer service and communication. IT and health and safety would also benefit staff. Elements to be able to pass information on to train staff themselves from training undertaken by business owners would therefore benefit members and staff alike.

Welsh Language

27% use Welsh language in their business, and of those who do use Welsh the main uses are to communicate with customers and suppliers (79%) to communicate internally (39%), in signage and documentation (37%) and in marketing activities (35%). Of those members not currently using Welsh 19% would be interested in support to use Welsh and a further 13% don't know. The type of support felt to be most beneficial to those not currently using Welsh would be funding support (49%) and practical support and guidance (40%). There is therefore scope for recognised

Welsh Language Business Support to replace the current Welsh Language Board provision with regard to small businesses voluntarily wishing to use Welsh in business. There may be a need to consider what would be available for businesses voluntarily wishing to define their intentions to provide a bilingual service as much as they are able or appropriate to their business in relation to their customers, as opposed to standards which sound a heavier commitment, and could be off-putting to an average SME. The role of promotion and support may therefore be better split from the governance role regarding setting the standards and scrutiny for small businesses to be encouraged to use Welsh.

Environment

The majority of businesses (54%) feel that renewable energy should be prioritised for investment in Wales, and in particular Marine (wave and tidal) is preferred as a source (28%). The majority of members believe that being more environmentally responsible will have no impact on their business (49%), however 26% believe it will have a positive impact and only 12% believe that it will have a negative impact. Impacts considered positive are primarily attracting/ increasing customer base as a result of a 'green reputation' (51%) and cost savings through improved building efficiency (41%) and more efficient business processes (38%). 27% of businesses also see cost saving potential through the introduction of a micro-generation scheme. More information need to be given to small business on what opportunities could provide a positive opportunity for a small business.

Procurement

Over half of members are aware of Sell2Wales as a service, and 1 in 4 have used it. However 43% are unaware and the rating given by those who have used it is in the middle ground (28% fairly good and 30% neither good nor poor). This service needs to continue to improve its service to small businesses and actively promote its services to the small business sector.

The survey was circulated via **email**, so if you did not receive it please contact your Regional Organiser, Mike Learmond, North Wales, mike.learmond@fsb.org.uk or Dai Davies, South Wales, dai.davies@fsb.org.uk to update your contacts. The FSB conducts a regular **Survey Panel** every month via email, there is no need to fill it in every month, however when there is an important topic that you want to respond on you'll have the opportunity to feed in your views to shape our policies, so let your Regional Organiser know if you'd like to sign up.

In addition, the Wales Policy team will be setting up **focus groups on key issues** in order to inform their policies and manifesto for the Wales Assembly elections in 2010. The team find them hugely valuable in making the case for small businesses so if you would like to be involved in these focus groups please contact Non Rhys, Wales Policy Manager, at non.rhys@fsb.org.uk