Written response to the recommendations from Federation of Small Businesses

Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give our views on the above.

I have enclosed comments on the Federation’s views and hope you find them useful.

If you wish to further discuss any of the comments please contact Eileen Calveley our Scottish Policy Development Officer on telephone: 0141-221-0775 or by e-mail Scotland.policy@fsb.org.uk.

Andy Willox
Scottish Policy Convener
FSB
03 December 2007
The Federation of Small Businesses is Scotland’s largest direct member business organisation, representing 19,000 members. The FSB campaigns for an economic and social environment that allows businesses to grow and prosper.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute written evidence to the committee on the *Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities* report, following up on the oral evidence given by our Policy Convenor, Andy Willox and our former Press and Parliamentary Officer, Niall Stuart, to the committee on 10th January 2006.

**Committee Recommendations**

The FSB supports recommendation 14 that “Business Able” be rolled out across Scotland to encourage more disabled people to start up their own businesses. The FSB campaigns for a thriving small business sector and is sure that disabled people would have the drive and determination to succeed, which is necessary in the small business sector of the economy. However, we have seen little evidence of increased take-up of this in the last year. We feel that more needs to be done to promote this programme.

Recommendation 15 talks about raising awareness and providing information to employers on the employment of disabled people through the enterprise agencies. The FSB believes that more could be done as we have not seen any significant improvement in this area. As an example, the definition of the range of disabilities is something that continues to be unclear to many of our members. Small business owners are often so busy running their businesses that they don’t always appreciate the various nuances of the legislation needed to equip a work place for an individual who has an impairment or disability, willing as that employer may be to employ a particular individual. A list of disabilities being made available would be helpful. This would inform small business owners what measures they should have in place to enable an employee with a particular disability to join the workforce.

Following discussions with many of our members, we have found that information is still lacking in this area and it needs to be made clearer what is expected of small business owners, if they employ someone with a disability. Information needs to be distributed more widely to inform employers that support is available to them through, for example, the “Access to Work” programme, to help them make the necessary changes to their workplace.

Recommendation 75 talks about providing training to staff in tourism businesses. While many small businesses do provide good quality training to their employees, there are issues surrounding cost and economies of scale. Small businesses are already required to ensure training is provided in areas such as health & safety and food hygiene as well as practical workplace training. Additional requirements would increase this burden and should not be imposed on small businesses. Courses on dealing with customers with special needs can also be very expensive and so public sector support should be available to coordinate the provision and minimise the cost to small
Small businesses are more flexible in terms of their recruitment process and often tend to recruit in a more informal way. So, while we would always seek to promote best practice, we feel that recommendation 20 could place an undue burden on small businesses, both in terms of cost and time.

The FSB is not aware of any progress being made in relation to recommendation 24, which calls for the Scottish Government to establish a national framework for supported employment of disabled people in Scotland. We are positive about this recommendation as long as there are no additional regulations and it does not duplicate requirements already set out in the Disability Discrimination Act.

Recommendation 35 seeks to ensure that employers are equal clients in any supported employment framework and that the employer should have equal status to that of the job seeker in terms of the support worker. While we are not aware that this has been an issue, we do believe that it is a laudable aim.

Recommendation 85 calls on industry organisations to issue guidance to members. The FSB is proud of its consultation and communication with its members and would be happy to include, where possible, any advice which is made available, but little has been provided in the past year.

Recommendation 96 seeks to ensure that the Scottish Government works with industry organisations as partners in a campaign to address the apparent lack of awareness amongst commercial organisations of the spending power of disabled people and the need to make services available to them. The FSB is happy to support this campaign, but we have not been made aware of it as yet. This particular example shows that there is much communication work still to do to ensure the dissemination of information as widely as possible.

**Conclusion**

As we said at the beginning, the FSB welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important issue. Despite the difficulties that small business faces in terms of lack of time to consider in-depth all publications issued through government, small and medium sized enterprises are a major part of the Scottish economy and need to be fully aware of the issues involved in the employment of people with disabilities.

As we have tried to explain in this submission, there is still much work to do in terms of informing small businesses what rights and responsibilities they have as employers. This could be done through existing channels, such as the “Access to Work” programme and the Business Gateway.

As with any new set of recommendations the Government proposes, they should remember that the small business community has many demands on their time and do not have resources dedicated to implementing new guidelines as a larger company may do. Directions should be clear and
concise, to make it as simple as possible for the small business to implement the committee’s recommendations.