SUBMISSION FROM THE FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Introduction

The FSB is Scotland’s largest direct-member business organisation, representing around 19,000 members. The FSB campaigns for an economic and social environment which allows small businesses to grow and prosper.

This note sets out the planned activities of the FSB in relation to the independence referendum.

FSB approach to the referendum

The FSB has a long-established approach to constitutional issues and election campaigns and this will form the foundation of our referendum-related activity. In particular, the FSB will maintain a neutral stance.

The focus of FSB activity during the referendum campaign will be on highlighting issues raised by our members and increasing the focus on small business matters, thereby seeking to improve the quality of the debate and make it more relevant to our membership. To further support FSB members, we will work with them to explore the issues which are of most relevance to their business and then provide them with the best possible information on these points prior to the vote.

Discussions with our members throughout 2013 indicated that they did not feel they had enough relevant information. Despite the subsequent publication of the White Paper and UK government publications, anecdotal evidence suggests that our members still feel that the practicalities of change for small businesses – the sort of day-to-day issues which have a real impact on how you do business – have not been explored adequately.

Therefore, to ensure our members can both air their questions and get the right information, we have been undertaking a programme of work on the referendum throughout 2013 and into 2014. Key elements include:

- A national, business-focused debate in Stirling in September 2013.
- Attendance at our Scottish Policy Committee by both UK and Scottish governments to discuss their preparatory work for the referendum.
- A survey of our membership in April 2014 to better understand levels of preparation, questions, fears and opportunities from a small business perspective.
- Commissioning the University of Edinburgh Business School to analyse responses of our survey and to provide the best available information to answer questions raised.
- Subsequent production of a report, based on the academic research, which will act as a reference guide for our members ahead of the vote.
- A number of our local branches are planning debates in coming months, sometimes working closely with other local business organisations.

- A national FSB debate will be held in Edinburgh in late August 2014.

**Conclusion**

We accept that delivering a definitive guide to the impact of independence on all the practical issues which affect how business is done on a daily basis is easier said than done. Nevertheless, we have a duty to help our members make an informed choice on 18th September and this will remain our focus.

Colin Borland  
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