

## ••• The FSB - who we are and what we do ...



Being a member of the FSB offers a range of benefits for business people.

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) was established in 1974 in the north of England and in Northern Ireland in 1984. Today there are over 210,000 members, with more than 7000 in Northern Ireland alone.

The FSB's aim is to be the largest and most effective organisation promoting and protecting the interests of the self employed and small business owners within the UK as a member-led, non-profit making and non-party political organisation.

There are three distinct areas of work – members interests, press and parliamentary and lobbying and policy-making.

The Head of Public Affairs and Head of Policy are both based in Westminster, which gives them access to government and policy makers. There are also press and parliamentary offices in Belfast, Glasgow and Cardiff that provide for lobbying in the devolved parliaments.

Being a member of the FSB offers a range of benefits for business people, including a 24 hour legal help-line, a business banking service which offers free banking, an FSB credit card and other financial services including independent financial advice and tax advice.

The FSB is divided into regions throughout the UK. Northern Ireland is one region with five branches. Each branch has a chairman and a committee and those branches meet regularly and hold events for

their members. Events include business workshops, information evenings and fundraising nights.

### FSB Annual Conference 2007

One of the highlights for the Northern Ireland region in 2007 was the FSB Annual Conference that was held at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast at the end of March. It was the first time in the Federation's 33-year history that the conference had been held in Belfast and it was hailed as a great success. Almost 650 delegates travelled from across the UK for a three-day programme of events. The two keynote speakers included then First Minister Ian Paisley and Sinn Fein MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) Mitchell McLaughlin.

Also speaking was the then Minister for Small Businesses the Rt. Hon. Margaret Hodge MP and the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne MP.

TV personality Gloria Hunniford also chaired a Question and Answer session and Simon Woodroffe from the BBC2 Dragon's Den programme hosted a Lion's Lair competition.

As it was one of the biggest events ever held in Belfast, the end-of-conference Gala Ball had to be held in the Odyssey Arena and was decorated to look like the ballroom in the Titanic. ►



► The FSB continued...

The success of the conference meant it acted as a showcase for both the Northern Ireland region of the FSB, Belfast city and Northern Ireland as a whole.

Each branch also held a number of events in 2007, in the South East, a series of information seminars on inheritance and other taxes, in the Western, drinks receptions in the Lord Mayor's Parlour by the Belfast City Branch and, a Women in Business workshop by the North East.

Regional activities also included raising money for the FSB's chosen charity, which in 2006 was Action Cancer and for 2007/08, is Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Another major area of the FSB's work is as a campaigning pressure group. The FSB devises its own policies based on the needs of their members and uses those to lobby parliament.

FSB Policy is formulated following consultation with their members, about what they need to make their businesses flourish and contribute to a strong economy. Every two years the FSB carries out a survey of members on a range of subjects to gauge their views. The results are published in the Barriers to Growth document, which is used as the main point for drawing up policy. The next survey will be conducted this year (2008).

In March 2007 the FSB in Northern Ireland launched its own manifesto ahead of the Assembly elections that contained all their own policies. Called Thinking Big for Small Businesses, it was distributed widely to all the election candidates, press and media.

### Young Entrepreneurs

The FSB is also involved in encouraging young entrepreneurial talent and each year an awards ceremony is held with the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges to recognize the achievements of the best business students in each of the Colleges of Further Education.

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