
Business Committee Legacy Inquiry

FSB Wales Submission

13 November 2015





Business Committee Legacy Inquiry FSB Wales

FSB Wales welcomes the opportunity to present its views to the Business Committee. FSB Wales is the authoritative voice of businesses in Wales. With 10,000 members, a Welsh Policy Unit, two regional committees and twelve branch committees; FSB Wales is in constant contact with business at a grassroots level. It undertakes regular online surveys of its members as well as a biennial membership survey on a wide range of issues and concerns facing small business.

The terms of reference for the inquiry:

During the current Assembly, the Presiding Officer and Business Committee have introduced a number of procedural reforms, including changing the deadlines for tabling Oral Assembly Questions, introducing regular Individual Member Debates, and leaders' and spokespeople's questions.

- *What impact have these changes had in enabling Members to represent their constituents and hold the government to account?*

We believe the ability to submit Oral Assembly Questions for answer later has been a positive step in enabling the Assembly to more effectively scrutinise the Government's response to current events. The introduction of spokespeople's questions has also been a positive, and has enabled more robust scrutiny of Ministers.

However, we have concerns over the frequency of Individual Members Debates and Opposition Debates, largely as we have seen a number of topics repeated on a near monthly basis. This is not an effective use of Assembly Members' time and time we feel would be better devoted to scrutiny in committees.

We have concerns over the transparency of the system for determining Urgent Questions, and we feel the Presiding Officers should be required to publish reasons for refusal of Urgent Questions.

For the first time, the committee structure of the Fourth Assembly, combined policy and legislative scrutiny within the same committees.

- *How effective has this approach been and how have committees achieved a balance between their policy, financial and legislative scrutiny?*
- *What changes could be made to committee size and structure in future to make them more effective?*

We believe that the current committee structure can assist in creating subject expertise within the Assembly and should be preserved. However, committees have not been particularly effective in scrutinising secondary legislation arising from Assembly Bills. In order to tackle this, committees should look to establishing sub-committees to examine regulation, above and beyond the work already undertaken by the Constitutional and Legislative affairs committee.



Committee Chairs should be elected by all Assembly Members rather than selected by Party Leaders, as they are in the UK parliament.

The Business Committee is responsible for setting the Assembly timetable, including scheduling committee meetings. Currently, Plenary meets on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, with committees meeting mostly on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, and Thursdays.

- *Does the current Assembly timetable, including the structure of the working week and committee/Plenary slots provide the correct balance in terms of the use of the Assembly's time, allowing it to effectively perform its functions of making laws, representing the people of Wales, and holding the government to account?*

No, as indicated above, Assembly business, particularly on Wednesday afternoons has been repetitious and we do not feel that this is an effective use of the limited time of Assembly Members. It is also clear that committees do not have as much time available for evidence gathering as might be liked, therefore a better balance between plenary and committee time could be struck.

Thursday afternoons are not a well used slot, with many committees seemingly reluctant to hold sessions in this slot – FSB Wales believes that given the limited amount of time available, and the often 'crowded' nature of evidence sessions, that committees should be encourage to make full use of this time.

The Business Committee is responsible for establishing timetables for committees to consider Bills, and LCMs, in line with Standing Orders.

- *Do the current processes for timetabling legislation – including Bills and LCMs – allow for proper scrutiny and engagement by Members and stakeholders? Could it be made more effective?*

In considering Bills, we do not feel the Assembly effectively uses outside expertise to scrutinise legislation at Stage 2 and 3. There have been limited public evidence sessions at these stages, with most lobbying done behind closed doors. It is also true that Bills can significantly change shape in Stage 2, and that organisations' views may change from Stage 1 given the amendments in place or likely to be taken forward. Therefore FSB Wales believes some consideration should be given to recalling organisations and witnesses who are currently called in at Stage 1 for further evidence towards the end of Stage 2, before a Bill is returned to the full Assembly.



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The Federation of Small Businesses Wales

The FSB Wales is non-profit making and non-party political. The Federation of Small Businesses is the UK's largest campaigning pressure group promoting and protecting the interests of the self-employed and owners of small firms. Formed in 1974, it now has 200,000 members across 33 regions and 194 branches. FSB Wales currently has around 10,000 members, a Welsh Policy Unit, two regional committees and twelve branch committees meaning FSB Wales is in constant contact with small businesses at a grassroots level in Wales.

Lobbying

From the Press and Parliamentary Affairs Office in Cardiff, FSB Wales campaigns with AMs, MPs and MEPs in Cardiff Bay, Westminster and Brussels in order to promote our members' interests. FSB Wales also works closely with local, regional and national media outlets to highlight our members' concerns. Development Managers work alongside members in our regions to further FSB Wales influence at a regional level. More widely, the FSB has Press and Parliamentary Offices in Westminster, Glasgow, Belfast and Brussels to lobby the respective Governments.

Member Benefits

In addition, Member Services is committed to delivering a wide range of high quality, good value business services to members of the FSB. These services will be subject to continuing review and will represent a positive enhancement to the benefit of membership of the Leading Business organisation in the UK.

Vision

A community that recognises, values and adequately rewards the endeavours of those who are self employed and small business owners within the UK.

The Federation of Small Businesses is the trading name of the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Limited. Our registered office is Sir Frank Whittle Way, Blackpool Business Park, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY4 2FE. Our company number is 1263540 and our Data Protection Act registration number is Z7356876. We are a non-profit making organisation and we have registered with the Information Commissioner on a voluntary basis.