

NAVIGATOR

The logo for 'NAVIGATOR' features the word in a large, black, serif font. The letter 'I' is replaced by a circular emblem. This emblem consists of a globe with latitude and longitude lines, a human face with curly hair superimposed on top, and a smaller globe positioned above the main globe's top edge.

The Small Business
Trade Association Forum
Perceptions of Representatives and HSE Staff

Summary

Coi job number 272078

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Background, Objectives, Method

- Research required among both Trade Association (TA) representatives and HSE staff to understand views of the Forum's progress
- Telephone interviews conducted, from 5-50 minutes duration
 - 27 TA representatives
 - 10 HSE staff with experience of presenting topics to the forum

Hopes of the Forum - Representatives

- *'Make the voice of small business heard'*
 - both small business
 - and / or their association's type of small business
- *'Lobby about specific issues'*
 - putting a point of view when their industry is directly affected
 - some only envisage attending when such issues are on the agenda
- *'Learn about forthcoming changes and initiatives'*
 - some have the underlying policy or regulation in mind
 - others are happy to input at any level
- *'Information about developments in H&S'*
 - access to 'information flow' from HSE, contacts, 'bulk copies' of publications
 - 'H&S' often a core part of their trade association's work and their 'offer'



Is the Forum Delivering? - Representatives

- Overall, representatives were positive in their attitudes to the Forum
 - existence of the Forum in itself a step forward for small business
 - implicit recognition of the value of trade associations to HSE
- Some feel the Forum has already helped to influence HSE / HSC and shape implementation of policy
- Others feel demonstrable effects have been confined largely to ‘publications’ or communications, rather than ‘fundamentals’
 - influencing fundamentals was seen to be a ‘long game’
 - too early to expect to see results
 - but ultimately the basis on which the Forum will be judged
 - NB. some do see communications as a strategic issue
- However, they were optimistic for the future



Consultation Within Associations Representatives

- Consultation with TA members has so far been relatively limited, mainly because representatives felt there had not been the need
- However, lack of consultation is in part a resource issue
 - reflects how easy it is for a TA to consult members
 - whether they have in place a 'slick' mechanism for doing so
- There had been relatively little 'follow on' from the meetings themselves
- Although representatives felt that had it been required relevant HSE personnel **would** have been willing facilitators
- Some gave examples where they *had* taken issues up and HSE staff had been directly involved in 'next steps'



Pre and Post Meeting Documentation Representatives

- Representatives can feel there is a lot to go through, but no more than is necessary
 - extent of output is for many symptomatic of why the Forum exists
 - frequent spontaneous praise of ‘excellent documentation’
- For some the documentary output, including ‘non Forum’ elements is more important than the meetings themselves
- All felt that the output was well presented, clear, concise, and easy to absorb
- Suggestions that paper format should be available, and that electronic delivery could be enhanced



Forum Meetings - Representatives

- Feelings towards the way the meetings are run are very positive with only very occasional and minor niggles
- Positive comments re ambience and group dynamics
 - good forum for debate, no shortage of comment from the floor
 - no one felt that they would find it difficult to make a contribution
 - chairman felt to run the meetings well
 - brisk, no nonsense down to earth manner, in tune with representatives
 - tries to draw out comment, manages those trying to ride hobby horses
- Good opportunities for networking in and around the meeting
- Some concerns over what might happen if Forum continues to grow
 - current size (about 20) thought about right
 - will Forum become more formal, less discursive if it grows much more?

Growing Forum Membership

- It will be hard to maintain the positive ambience of the meetings themselves if attendance becomes too large
- However, due to pressure of time and need to prioritise, not all new recruits to the Forum will attend every meeting
- Some may have in mind only attending when they feel there is an item of specific relevance to their TA on the agenda
- This could work to the Forum's advantage as the net for consultation could become wider while the relatively intimate atmosphere of the current meeting format can be preserved



HSE Staff

- Some feel they have benefited much more from the Forum than others
- Possible factors behind these differences seemed to include...
 - expectations of HSE staff
 - the subject, how it was presented, and what was possible
 - the subject's relevance to the attendees
- Worth exploring why some sessions seem to have been more productive than others
- This will help to inform what subjects might be most usefully debated by the forum
- Not every issue that affects small business will be appropriate for presenting to the meetings of the Forum
- Neither will the Forum be the most appropriate source of feedback in every case

