

Small Business Trade Association Forum Notes

Date of Meeting: 27th September 2004 2pm –4pm

Location: Rose Court

Top table: Judith Donovan (Forum Chair), Bill Callaghan (HSC Chairman) and Colin Douglas (Communications Director)

HSE Representatives: Donald Goodhew, Elizabeth Hornsby, and Hani El-Sabbahy

Forum member presents: British Chambers of Commerce; Federation of Small Business; Small Business Bureau; National Hairdressers Federation; Federation of Master Builders; Engineering Employers Federation; British Woodworking Federation; British Wood Preserving & Damp-Proofing Association; British Dental Association; The Road Haulage Association; National Farmers Union; Confederation of British Industry); Institute of Directors; National Federation of Retail Newsagents.

Introduction (Judith Donovan)

- HSE at last has a Director of Communications, we are a bit behind other departments and agencies;
- HSE still has only three people dealing with small business issues.

Forum in the context of the Strategy (Bill Callaghan)

- Forum's purpose is to hear from you as small business representatives;
- The strategy's four themes are: Closer partnerships; Benefits of sensible health and safety; Focusing on core work; Communications.

Practical approach towards small businesses (Judith Donovan)

- There are 100s & 100s of small businesses which are all different, so there is a need to balance their views;
- I need the power of you the small business trade associations behind me;
- We want you to suggest how to drive this new model of cooperating forward;
- We're not here to lecture you about the next regulations.

Issues Discussed

The discussion mainly covered the following five issues. The main points raised by forum members are bulleted under each issue. Responses by Judith are shown in blue immediately after the point.

Forum as an idea and how it should operate:

- Forum was welcomed as a good initiative;
- Forum should look at high level horizon scanning issues rather than scrutinising leaflets/minutiae of regulations;
- Forum members have the power to consult their constituents and bring forward a consensus view from them;
- Propose 5 outcomes from Forum:

1. Establish a new image for HSE;
2. More marketing regarding how effective Health and Safety helps SMEs;
3. Simple skills scheme for those who implement health and safety;
4. Assist trade bodies using FOD sectors;
5. Influence suppliers and clients and reward them.

HSE's Image:

- HSC/HSE/LAs are seen as the enemy bringing regulations and expense but not enforcing enough. Prosecuting more would help retain and increase membership of Trade Bodies;
- The attitude of some operatives who visit premises is arrogant unfriendly.
- We have the opportunity to correct negative views of health and safety and help businesses to see the business opportunity of better health and safety
- HSE has a serious image problem. Marketing is important to help improve the image.
- Workers safety advisers are very successful. Feedback indicates great value of someone slightly removed from HSE.

Publications

- There is lot of health and safety information available;
- Some very good leaflets in some industries;
- Good web site;
- Some of the industrial process guidance notes are utter gobbledegook;
- No problem with legislation the problem is with the format of guidance. The leaflets are great but only if you have time to read them.

Marketing and External Communications

- Encouraged we've got a communications director;
- Communication needs to be two-way;
- We need to make messages (1) simpler, (2) fewer and understandable, (3) co-ordinated.
- Use Forum members as intermediaries in whatever way you can;
- Businesses want to know what they *don't* have to do, not just what they must do;
- Consultative documents are getting thicker and thicker.

Small Business

- Awareness is a key issue, small business won't trawl the Internet searching for information on health and safety;
- Most small businesses want to comply with health and safety law;
- A lot of businesses do not belong to a trade association so there may be a need to filter messages through the supply chain;
- Small firms don't have a health and safety specialist and so are much harder to get information to.

EU

- The Forum should keep a look out for horizon issues that effect health and safety and small businesses, from Europe;
- There is a need to flag up issues regarding the EU, to ensure HSE is involved and knows our concerns e.g. costs to business.

Conclusion

Terms of Reference (Judith Donovan):

I will draft terms of reference and come back to you. They will include:

- (1) Two-way dialogue;
- (2) Hard (legislation, other government departments) and soft (Making guidance less academic) agendas.

Bill Callaghan:

- Other Fora exist for drafting regulations on specific subjects;
- Standards mustn't slip we want you to help improve standards;
- Peer to peer communications of health and safety messages are very important. One of your members saying health and safety has business benefits is more powerful than hearing it from me;
- We need to be realistic about what we can/can't do;
- There is no need for any more EU legislation but it will come;
- There is scope to work with trade associations and give our blessing to their guidance;
- We need to be more open, not duplicating other discussion methods.

Next meeting:

- Chair/Colin Douglas to bring along an HSE person to consult;
- Which three things you'd like HSE to change;
- Opportunity for HSE to respond on why we could or could not do something.

Colin Douglas' suggestions:

- That HSE does a summary of top issues to be aware of. Draft available for next meeting.
- That Trade Associations can take bits of our copyright material and use it. HSE is undertaking to provide written information to be used by trade associations