

About

Building on the success of our first Policy Conference in 2014, we hosted the FSB Policy Conference 2016 – **‘Small Business 2020: inspiring growth, innovation and ambition’** - on Tuesday 2 February at Queen Elizabeth II Centre, Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, London SW1P 3EE.

In a rapidly changing business environment, the event saw key politicians, business leaders, policymakers and FSB members come together to set the small business policy agenda for the future. The day was hosted by leading BBC business presenter, Steph McGovern.

The conference included three high level sessions which focussed on: **Rebalancing the UK economy; High-growth global future for small businesses;** and **Growing tomorrow’s entrepreneurs - innovation and competition.**

Session one - Rebalancing the UK economy

Rebalancing the economy requires significant investment in all nations and regions of the UK, including transport, digital infrastructure, housing and energy. Transport connectivity plays a major role to help small businesses compete and grow by providing access to global supply routes, new customers and a skilled workforce. Yet for years regions have suffered from a lack of investment. Devolving wide-ranging powers to new combined authorities, such as transport, offers significant opportunities for local businesses and their wider communities. For the benefits of devolution to be fully harnessed, newly empowered local leaders must understand the needs of small businesses and how best to stimulate local growth.

Hot topic questions:

- What should a 21st century vision for the UK’s infrastructure look like, and how can we best deliver this?
- How can Devolution Deals maximise the economic potential of small firms to deliver lasting economic benefits to their local communities?
- What can policymakers do to ensure that rural economies are not left behind?
- How can major infrastructure projects deliver procurement opportunities for smaller businesses that save money and boost growth?

Session two - High-growth, global future for small businesses

Helping small firms scale up and grow with an international outlook from the start is essential for the future competitiveness of the UK. In an increasingly globalised economy, policymakers need to create the conditions for start-ups and established firms to achieve their full growth potential, often in a short timescale. The Government needs to provide both a stable environment for business as well as targeted interventions to support the ambitions of high-growth firms. This includes tailored assistance to give more firms the confidence to enter overseas markets, and putting in place a suite of finance solutions to firms at different stages of the business life-cycle. While progress has been made in recent years, there is still more to be done to support the high-growth, global small businesses of 2020 and beyond, on which the future of the economy depends.

Hot topic questions:

- How can policymakers boost the number of start-ups that go on to become high-growth companies?
- To what extent are current obstacles to accessing finance hindering the ambitions of UK entrepreneurs and established small firms? And how can these be removed?
- What can Government do to boost the number of exporting small firms, particularly in new and emerging markets?
- How do we further streamline the plethora of business support programmes to enable companies to grow?

Session three - Growing tomorrow's entrepreneurs - innovation and competition

The enterprise landscape is rapidly evolving, often driven by the growing role of technology in every aspect of doing business – from transformative new ways to reach customers to pioneering new business models that fundamentally alter the way business is done. Creating the conditions for new disruptive market entrants and for innovative companies to realise their potential and develop new ideas is key to boosting competition, growth and productivity. There is also a need to prepare the next generation of entrepreneurs for this rapidly changing world. To achieve the dynamic, innovation-driven economy of tomorrow, we must equip potential new business owners, the self-employed, start-ups and the rest of the business world with the skills, behaviours and entrepreneurial spirit to break into new markets.

Hot topic questions:

- What conditions are needed to make it easier for new innovative businesses and technologies to emerge and enter the market? Who should drive this?
- How should policymakers respond to innovations in business models, including the emergence of the 'sharing economy' and other new technology platforms?
- What skills, behaviours and insights do small businesses need from the workforce of the future in order to grow, innovate and compete?
- What support do young entrepreneurs need from policymakers and other peer groups to turn their ideas into successful businesses?