

22nd MEETING - NATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM: 1 MAY 2019
DISCUSSION REPORT: Developing and improving Scotland's export capacity and capability

Host: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy

Speaker / facilitator: Nora Senior CBE, Chairman UK Regions and Ireland, Weber Shandwick

Scribe: David McPhee, Directorate for International Trade & Investment

Summary

There was a positive discussion with many participants recognising the importance of a One Scotland approach. Participants also highlighted the importance of businesses being able to access the appropriate support and being able to do so without searching too hard to find it.

Introduction and Background

Mr Ewing welcomed the group and highlighted that he was pleased to see the publication of *A Trading Nation*. He noted that the plenary session had contained a very positive discussion and looked forward to continuing to work with businesses on the issues raised.

Nora Senior introduced herself noting that she has been involved in getting businesses into new markets across the globe for a number of years. Nora started by challenging the audience with a couple of questions:

- What are the most important services or support to get business exporting?
- Is there clear targeting of resources?

Nora then asked businesses to highlight the biggest issues around exporting through a post it notes exercise. The summary of this is included below.

Topics discussed:

The Main points raised included:

General

- Participants noted that it was good to see an evidenced based report.
- The role of SDI is crucial to supporting businesses and it is important that they "up their game" on the back of the plan
- A range of people highlighted the need for a breadth of services (including digital) to support a range of businesses.
- The importance of getting the single portal right was also highlighted.

Allocating Resources

- Getting infrastructure right is key to success. Wider resources should be focussed on getting this to work for exporting
- Need to focus resources to help those businesses that have the most chance of success (innovation is also key to this).
- Important to note that it is not all about money, getting businesses working together is really important.
- Government can bring co-ordination of asks and consider the wider needs of sectors (including digital and physical infrastructure)

Skills

- A number of people highlighted that skills is a key issue for businesses
- This is more general than an exporting issue but is key for this
- Mentoring can be helpful in dealing with this – important to get businesses facing the same issues otherwise the advice may not resonate.

Post it notes

- The importance of raising ambition of companies was highlighted
- Businesses want ways to minimise risk
- Providing wider and holistic support is important (businesses should not have to navigate the government system)
- Need to ensure support is inclusive and that it is not about whether “your face fits”
- Important to have practical support that can be accessed quickly – delays cost businesses money and opportunities
- Clear information provision by Government is helpful.

Closing Comments

The Cabinet Secretary made the following comments on closing:

- Businesses should be able to access appropriate support easily
- It is businesses that will export and have to decide when and if to do this.
- Government should and can be supportive but it is up to businesses to grasp opportunities
- Skills is an important issue but will take time to get right
- The key aim is for Government to remove the barriers so that business can get on with delivering the export growth which is required.

Scottish Government
May 2019