



## **All-Party Parliamentary Group for Professional Sales**

Meeting (by video call) Tuesday 23 November 2021, 17:00

Under discussion:

### **The role of sales in driving the UK's international trade**

Attendees:

Mark Pawsey MP, chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Professional Sales

Patrick Joiner, MD, Institute of Sales Professionals (ISP)

Guy Lloyd – ISP director, fellow, head of APPG secretariat

Richard Brooks

David Bill

Ken Le Meunier-FitzHugh

Barry Hilton

Nick Laird

Patricia Seabright

Jim Irving

Adam Harding

Julie Kapsalis

Gurinder Singh

John Tunstall

Apologies from:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) – Mike Freer MP and Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP

Discussion items:

#### **1. Research results from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on the role of professional selling among SMEs**

ISP fellow Richard Brooks (RB) who is helping to shape the ISP's policy towards SMEs, shared the findings of his survey of SME owners and senior managers. Research carried out between August and October 2021.

Survey revealed the top sales skills wanted by SMEs are: key account management, communication and selling strategies.

RB: Surprised that selling strategy was not the top priority but said the diverse nature of SMEs means that what they require from a sales function is as diverse as their own business.

RB included reference to the DIT's new 12-point plan and campaign: Made in the UK. Sold to the world.

Summary: exporting businesses are more competitive, pay higher wages, are more profitable, and global sales by SMEs support local jobs across the UK. Selling in different countries needs to be built on a firm foundation of being able to sell in your own market.

Challenges: foreign laws, regulation and political priorities, language, culture, payment methods, supply chains and global pricing

Comments and questions:

Ken Le Meunier-FitzHugh (KMF) mentioned the Small Business charter Help To Grow campaign funded by the government: <https://smallbusinesscharter.org/> KMF said there were a whole range of fascinating courses in accounting, "but the only thing which wasn't on the course, would you believe, was selling".

Guy Lloyd (GL) comments that the Middlesex business school's curriculum is 50 pages long but doesn't contain the words sales or selling. GL said: "That must take effort not to mention it."

Mark Pawsey said challenges were similar at Westminster, "where people unfortunately don't take the role of sales sufficiently seriously".

Gurinder Singh (GS) comments that negotiation skills are one of the most important parts of the "capability process". RB said negotiation skills came fifth in his SME survey of most important selling skills.

Patrick Joiner (PJ) warned the group of the danger of reinforcing a negative message that the group is trying to counter. He said that we should stop saying it's a shame that nobody thinks sales is a profession. Instead, we should constantly reinforce the professional nature of sales.

GS: I'm not necessarily a fan of copying the US, but the relationship between sales professionals and the customer, and recognition of that in the US is completely different.

KMF: There are about 50 universities in the US teaching sales courses - undergraduate and postgraduate courses. It's also not an academic subject in the UK. And that's another big issue as well.

Mark Pawsey (MP) agrees with PJ saying Patrick makes a really good point that we need to talk about sales as a profession and talk it up.

## **2 Export performance**

Mark Pawsey asks how we can encourage SMEs to be more ambitious and provide them with the separate and different skills to compete in a world market rather than a domestic market.

KMF: Surprised the government's talking about wanting to open up Asia but is increasing tax on flights to Asia.

MP: Can we acquire the skills that will enable us to be successful without necessarily being face to face?

GL: In some cases, you cannot sell remotely. Other cases it might be okay. In some places you need to build the relationship before you can sell. Initially, that might be face to face, then you can sell remotely afterwards.

Patricia Seabright (PS): There are different skills and abilities; we need people to be able to sell further afield. Developing those skills needs to be part of the plan.

RB: Noted that when he had sought UK government support, it was good. He has conducted a lot of work in Latin America where he said the support was really helpful.

GL: Feedback from SMEs is that it's difficult to know where to find help. There needs to be more structure with, preferably, one place to go to get help. He said that at the moment, multiple places are offering help and it's very confusing.

Nick Laird (NL): We as a business find the US missions normally very, very helpful, and the UK ones are variable. There is a plethora of support and not enough coordination of it. Try to simplify it. One point of contact would be extremely helpful.

NL: Government can help business confidence by information sharing, making it simpler to access the resources available.

Mark Pawsey comments on a letter to all MPs from the DIT Secretary of State (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), dated 17 November 2021. It sets out a strategy which includes: an expansion of the UK's export support service; setting up a UK export account academy to offer SMEs in all parts of the UK the chance to learn how to navigate the technicalities of exporting; a pilot of the UK trade show programme to give UK companies especially SMEs a leg up to exhibit their products at trade shows; an expansion of UK export finance to provide finance for buyers, and launching the campaign: "Made in the UK. Sold to the world."

GL Mentions submitting a recent bid for a "government framework". It took him two weeks solid work just to get through the contract. He said SMEs don't have time or resources to do that.

Jim Irving (JI) gave example of an international conference, and government help being difficult to find. He appealed for a joined-up programme that would help everybody. He said for average SMEs that want to export, it's too complicated to find support.

Barry Hilton (BH) echoed call for focus and simplicity saying SMEs are too stretched to deal with complexity.

PJ mentions potential role for the Institute of Sales Professionals. He would like the DIT to put the Institute in touch with a UK contact on the ground in whatever territory so the Institute can host export master classes for SMEs, giving them direct access to commercial attaches and other experts in these areas where the UK has trade agreements.

### **3 Meeting with Government and lobbying MPs**

Mark Pawsey says he will push for a meeting with the DIT to discuss these issues. (Meeting between Mark Pawsey MP, and trade minister, Mike Freer MP took place on 7 December. <https://www.the-isp.org/news/52705202112-sales-campaigning-mp-meets-trade-minister> Mike Freer is also speaking at the next APPG meeting on 24 Feb 2022.)

Mark Pawsey (MP) advised that the way to drive change and make sure business-to-business selling was understood at the heart of government was to call for meetings with local MPs and ask them to join the all-party group so they become parliamentary ambassadors for the selling profession.

MP said: "Engage with your MPs and tell them why the issues that we discuss in this forum are important and why they need to be present at this meeting, hearing about the challenges that businesses are facing, in terms of getting the esteem of sales and getting good, capable people selling in export markets... We need you, and your clients, and other people to do that."

Patrick Joiner says we should accept that challenge to make sure that we have spoken to our MPs.

Guy Lloyd agreed it was incumbent "on all of us" to have that conversation with our MPs. "This an important subject; they need to understand it, because sales employs one in ten of the UK workforce."