

Minister Listens to Rural Businesses

Jo Gadsby recently attended 'The Rural Business in Action' event, WiRE's opportunity to show Mark Prisk MP how successful WiRE members are, and to explain what the issues are for rural business women.

Here Jo gives us her impression of the ministerial visit...

When I first heard that the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise, Mark Prisk MP, had agreed to attend WiRE's Rural Business in Action Day I thought it was terrific news. So when I was asked to attend, I had no hesitation accepting, even though it meant a three-hour drive back to Shropshire from Hertfordshire on a Friday evening.

With so many changes and cuts happening at the moment, it's easy as the owner of a small business to feel that I don't really figure in the big scheme – so to have the ear of the Minister for a couple of hours can, in my opinion, be no bad thing.

It was great arriving at the venue to see a number of fellow WiRE members with stalls set up showcasing their work. From gorgeous gifts to food and professional services, the stalls really showed off the breadth of businesses which make up WiRE. The Minister's office had asked for the event to be held in his constituency and all of the delegates and member speakers were from the East of England Region.

With a limited time slot, as soon as the Minister arrived he took a tour of the stalls, taking time to chat to each owner about their business and concerns.

The speakers and delegates had been carefully chosen by WiRE to show a range of different types of businesses and to demonstrate that small businesses provide employment, are ambitious to grow and improve, and are inventive and innovative.

Rebecca Rayner from Glebe Farm Flour and Bread Mixes told the audience about how she and her mother had developed a whole range of specialist flours since taking over the family farm. The specialist mixes are now exported round the world and Rebecca was confident that the business would continue to grow. Hanne Grice told us about her award winning business Walk the Dog and Sophie Garrett spoke both about her innovative web-based business yours2share, and about life as a WiRE Network Leader. During each speech, their professionalism and enthusiasm for their businesses and for WiRE shone through.

Dr David Llewellyn, Principal of Harper Adams University College, where WiRE is based, then explained to the minister the beneficial relationship between WiRE and the University and how the latter might be able to help further.

The minister took questions through the whole event. Several questions were asked about how the Government could make it easier for small businesses to employ people, with both apprentice schemes and the NICS holiday for new but not existing businesses being raised. The important question of rural broadband was also raised and the Minister explained that he was already pushing Ofcom on the matter.

Although not speakers on the day it was good to see Tor Harris, Director of the Prince's Rural Action Programme and Stuart Burgess CBE, from the Commission for Rural Communities attending the event. Stuart was particularly



Mark Prisk MP


keen to stress to Mr Prisk the importance of small businesses to rural areas – most of which are set up and led by women, he said.

Even though most of us are slightly (or more than slightly) sceptical about politicians, one thing was certain, Mark Prisk does know what he is talking about when it comes to both small and rural businesses. Having been brought up in Cornwall he has previously run his own business which he started as a sole trader. It was clear that a number of the points being raised resonated with him.

During his speech he outlined his vision for supporting small businesses, promising simpler web-based information portals, and stressing the importance of networks like WiRE.

Perhaps the most important thing to come out of the day was an invitation from Mark Prisk to meet him again in London to discuss how WiRE could be more involved. This is fantastic news and really cements WiRE's purpose of being *the* voice of rural business women.

Massive thanks have to go to Polly and Fiona who gave great speeches, kept the meeting on schedule and made sure we all got our points across.

Watch this space as they say! 

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